

Interview with Robert E. McCarthy

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ROBERT E. MCCARTHY

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: February 4, 2003

Copyright 2004 ADST

Q: Today is the fourth of February, 2003. This is an interview with Robert E. McCarthy. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you call yourself "Bob?"

McCARTHY: Yes, Bob McCarthy.

Q: Bob, well, let's start at the beginning. When and where you born?

McCARTHY: I was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1942.

Q: And, how did you happen to... were you a Canadian family or...

McCARTHY: Prior to WWII, my mother came to the U.S. She was a Canadian who lived outside Toronto in a small town. She saw an advertisement and came down to New York City to work for British Intelligence. For Sir William Stephenson... the "Intrepid" book and "The Quiet Canadian."

Q: Oh, yes, I was trying to say, he was the Spymaster.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes. His offices were at Rockefeller Center. My mother worked there, and during that time met my father. .He was born and raised in New York City, lived and died within a mile of where he was born in New York. They married. My father was in the service for four years, so she went back up to Canada, where I was born in 1942. She lived with her mother, and I was there for the first four years of my life.

Q: Okay, well let's go back. Could you tell me about your father and the McCarthys? What history do you know? How did they come to the United States and all that?

McCARTHY: Yes, they came, my great-grandfather, great-grandmother... They had a farm in New York State, north of New York City. There was a quarrel over the inheritance... they moved to New York City... My father's family all lived in upper New York City around the George Washington Bridge. He had five siblings. They lived in two apartment buildings very close to each other, with several families in each apartment building. A number of the men went into the police department. My father was a Port Authority police officer, two of his brothers-in-law were New York City police detectives. My mother's family is from Canada; originally they came from Scotland and England.

Q: What was her maiden name?

McCARTHY: Her maiden name was Heggie. They lived in a small town outside of Toronto, which is now a major suburban community, almost part of Toronto. She also came from a big family - five siblings. .She is the only one who left. Since the war, she has lived as a resident alien in the United States.

Q: Did you grow up in New York?

McCARTHY: Yes. I grew up in a working-class neighborhood, Washington Heights, at the upper part of Manhattan Island, close to where the Hudson River and Harlem River Barge Canal meet. The neighborhood was predominantly Irish, Jewish (a lot of #migr#s around

Library of Congress

the war) Greeks, Armenians, and then a sprinkling of other nationalities.Q: Did you grow up in a police atmosphere, I mean a police family was it pretty much, nor not?

McCARTHY: Not really. I mean if you listen to my father's political views, you'd never think he was a cop. He was very much on the other side of most of those issues.

Q: Sort of liberal...?

McCARTHY: Very much so. So it was not a cop family. I know what you're talking about.

Q: This was what I was asking.

McCARTHY: There were cop families, and I know what you mean. It wasn't like that at all. His approach to things was quirkier. He liked eccentrics. You'd be walking down the street and people would be crossing the street to avoid this person acting strangely, and my father would prefer to engage him in conversation. I think had made some kind of impression on me, that there are a lot of interesting folks in the world if you keep open to it all.

Q: Well, that's great. Did you have brothers, sisters?

McCARTHY: One sister, who lives in New York.

Q: Well where did you go to school?

McCARTHY: St. Elizabeth's grammar school, which was the local parish school, for eight years. Then I went to Fordham Preparatory School, which is a Jesuit high school, on the campus of Fordham University in the Bronx. After that I went on to Fordham University and later to Indiana University for a master's degree in Russian language and literature, and then I spent some time in the Army. I worked as an executive trainee in Stern's department store, taught speed-reading...

Library of Congress

Q: Well, let's go back. Let's go back to grammar school. Was your grammar school run by nuns?

McCARTHY: It was.

Q: Were they, when you stories about them, was it a pretty strict school?

McCARTHY: This was a teaching order, the Order of the Holy Child, and they were actually good. They had 50 kids in a class and managed to maintain order, teach, and keep you interested. There were a few crazy nuns, of course. There always were, and everybody realized that. But they were not nuns who had these fantastical ideas, outlawed patent leather shoes, and all that.

Q: At the elementary school, any particular things that particularly interested you... started you off on something...

McCARTHY: No, I think I was just a normal kid... played basketball, baseball, got a football and went up to the field after school. We were really lucky in that part of New York City, because we had a lot of parks. Washington Heights was high up, and the breezes came through. There was always something going on - sports, street games, and stickball.

Q: What about the ethnic mix in your school, in your neighborhood. Did you get involved in that?

McCARTHY: Yes, there was a public school and a Catholic school in the neighborhood. And if you took any one age group, say all the kids that were in the seventh grade and added them all up, you'd probably have 250-300 kids within an area of 10 blocks by 5 blocks, that's a LOT of kids your age in one place. And as I say, a lot of Jewish families, a lot of Irish families, a lot of Greeks, relative to the total number of Greeks in New York. On Greek New Year, you'd see the candles flickering all over the neighborhood. Not very many Blacks, some Puerto Ricans, some Italians, a large Armenian community... There's

Library of Congress

a large Armenian church there. In my school, it was Catholic, which in our neighborhood meant predominantly Irish. When you played with kids on the block, it was a complete mixture.

Q: Did the kids gang up on each other?

McCARTHY: To some extent, but I've read accounts of people growing up in New York, where things were much more tribal. Irish kids talked about never having known Jewish kids, and they thought the whole world was Ireland. That kind of isolation was not present in our neighborhood. There was some taunting, some gang fights, but nothing extreme. The ethnic differences came out in other ways usually. For example, I can remember going down to a Greek bakery with a Greek friend of mine and being so turned on by the different pastries and delicacies. And the Armenian kids would be running home to get kefta from the grandmothers. I don't mean to say everything was ideal. Some of the Irish kids taunted the Jewish kids, but it was a small minority that did that and it was episodic.

Q: When you moved to high school, how did you find the Jesuits and their teaching there?

McCARTHY: I liked the Jesuits a lot. They saw themselves as distinct from the nuns who had been our teachers up until then, and made no secret about it. It was a revelation to have a priest stand up in front of the class and talk about "Sister Mary Holy Candle Half Lit" or "Holy Mother Christ Lost in the Temple." They were disparaging, but well- meant remarks. The Jesuits saw themselves as being on a higher plane intellectually and as demanding more. I thought they were pretty good teachers and very interested in the students. They were strict enough, but it wasn't like the Irish Christian Brothers. There were no rubber hoses in the closets, there was no taking you into the storeroom and working you over. The approach was more subtle. For example, The Prefect of Discipline at Fordham Prep, Father Arthur Shay, could go into an auditorium of 500 students who'd all be talking and buzzing, and he'd go up onto the stage and stand there. Then he'd give this slight tilt of his shoulders and a slight arching of his head, and the whole room would

Library of Congress

fall silent. Completely. And I think we got the impression that learning was fun and it was just what you did.

Q: It was all boys, I take it.

McCARTHY: It was all boys.

Q: At elementary school, all boys too?

McCARTHY: Half and half. Girls sat on one side of the classroom. Boys sat on the other.

Q: At the high school, what courses grabbed you?

McCARTHY: I liked English and Latin. They were the two subjects I liked most.

Q: Was there, one hears the Jesuit using, have their own approach to logic and all that.

McCARTHY: Right.Q: Did they drill that in to you?

McCARTHY: I don't think they drilled it, as a lesson to be conveyed in itself. But in class, you were expected to defend your positions. They encouraged you to state your views and then defend them. They wouldn't hesitate to give their point of view and critique your reasoning. I think that came across strongly. Probably any good teacher is like that.

Q: Were there any extracurricular activities?

McCARTHY: Yes, a lot of intramural sports. There were big fields up there at the time, Fordham wasn't very built up, so after school it was very easy to grab a basketball and go out and play on the basketball court, or grab a football on the football field. And that's the way I used to do... I'd stay after school and play.

Q: How about at home? Was there a much, did the outside world intrude... I mean you say your father had a broad interest... Sort of at the dinner table would you discuss things?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes. Anything that came up. But it wasn't formal - not "Let's sit around the table, and we're going to discuss these topics. This is for the betterment of you children... I want each of you to take a point of view." None of that. The outside world also intruded via the library. The books that my mother got out of the library were just lying around. I remember reading so many different things that I didn't go out and get personally - you know, Vance Packard, Mary McCarthy, lots of topical books were lying around. And I went to the library myself a great deal. My father liked to talk and argue and discuss and more or less set us straight on the proper view of the world.

*Q: What about politics? Where did the family...you say your family was more of a...*McCARTHY: *A Democrat.*

Q: A good, solid Democrat.

McCARTHY: Oh, yes.

Q: How about the world beyond New York City? Did that come in at all?

McCARTHY: Well, it did because we went to Canada every summer. The whole Canadian side of the family ended up at this one lake, 100-120 miles north of Toronto. My great uncle was shell shocked after World War I, and he ended up there for the peace and quiet. He had been in banking but it didn't work out after the war. So, he went into semi-retirement up there, sold real estate, did some other things. Gradually, that became the area where people went in the summers. So, every summer I was with my aunts and uncles and all their kids around this lake. And "the world beyond New York City" intruded, in the sense that it was clear very early that there other ways of looking at the world. Ways other than the way Americans looked at the world. You know, you'd see a monument to the Loyalists who fell in the War of 1812. And there would be something to the effect that thanks to those brave men, if they hadn't done what they'd done, we Canadians might

Library of Congress

be- perish the thought - Americans today. [laughter] You know that type of thing. It was a different point of view.

Q: Did you get this... one of the things I've heard is that what defines Canadians is that they're not Americans.

McCARTHY: Absolutely.

Q: I was wondering if you were getting this from the other half of your family.

McCARTHY: Yes, sure. Very early on, view that the United States was too disorderly, too violent, sort of too immature, in a nice way. And yes, I always felt that they did have this sense of not being Americans.

Q: But you were in Ontario, and Ontario was the place for, that's where so many of the Loyalists went, ended up, and I mean that was kind of, still is, the heart of...

McCARTHY: I agree with you.

Q: Super Canadians, supposed to...

McCARTHY: And there was a lingering British influence. The issue of the new Canadian flag split my family into two camps. As you recall, the question was whether to have the Union Jack or the maple leaf on the flag. Different people were on different sides of that. But as far as I was concerned, there was no intensity of feeling. No accusation, "You're an American..." It was more joking. My cousins would have friends over and say, "Bob, tell us where you're from." And I'd say, "New Yawk," and they'd burst into peals of laughter, you know, that type of thing. [laughter]

Q: [laughter] Did you have a New York accent?

McCARTHY: Oh, yes, for sure.

Library of Congress

Q: I get a little, when you said, "for shuah" there, there was a little New York in that, but...

McCARTHY: It's been homogenized because of the Foreign Service. I definitely had a strong New York accent. It comes back when I'm with New York friends from my youth. Q: Well, you were really on a straight course, from the nuns, to the Fordham boys school and then you went to Fordham.

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: Couldn't you think of anything else to do? [laughter]

McCARTHY: [laughter] Well, that's true actually. I don't think I did particularly think about it.

Q: Well, you went to Fordham University too, the college.

McCARTHY: Yes, Fordham College on the Rose Hill campus in the Bronx, a part of Fordham University.

Q: Were you at all on the priestly track? Or not?

McCARTHY: No.

Q: Nobody tried to work on you for that?

McCARTHY: Well, it was pretty subtle. There was one semi-counseling session where one of the scholastics, the status one has before one becomes a priest, asked me, "Bob, have you thought of the priesthood?" And I said, "Well, I've pretty much thought of everything." "You've thought of everything, and you are still thinking about the priesthood?" he responded. That was one of those "Objection. Counsel is leading the witness" moments. But I had a wonderful out, because my mother was Protestant. Any time anything about religion came up, like in grammar school you were sort of pressured to be either a choirboy or an altar boy, and they'd ask me in class which I preferred, and I'd say, "Well, I'll

Library of Congress

have to check with my mother.” Those were the magic words. Suddenly everybody backed off. I suppose they figured: Let it be. He's in a Catholic school, God knows what would happen to him if we upset his mother. It gave me lots of running room.

The same thing at Fordham Prep. The counselor would bring you in and say, “Now, Robert, I understand that your mother is... um... Protestant...” like it was almost too horrible to mention the word. That gave me a lot of slack. [laughter]

Q: [laughter]

Q: *Were you feeling at the time, looking at it later, things have gotten so loose, but there was a time that if you were Catholic this set you apart. And if you were many other things, I mean people were put in little boxes. Did you feel that?*

McCARTHY: Not really, and it was probably because New York was so big, and there were so many Catholics there and there were so many Catholics in my neighborhood, so many Catholics that I associated with that I didn't really think of it as being a little box at all. I never heard a Pat-and-Mike joke, which is a type of ethnic joke that makes fun of the Irish, until I was in the Foreign Service. [laughter]

Q: [laughter]

McCARTHY: You could conclude, looking at the St. Elizabeth-Fordham Prep-Fordham College lock step, that I was isolated. I didn't feel it. I felt that I was in the best city in the world. There couldn't possibly be anything more interesting. Why would anyone go anywhere else? And people had that feeling, even if they had never been ten blocks south of where they lived or ten blocks north. It was just something you drank in with the New York water. Ultimately it's a bit provincial, I guess. Q: Speaking of which, did you get out and around New York?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes, a lot. It was wonderful. You did everything. You went to folk dances. You'd go down and get fifty-cent tickets to watch the football Giants play. You'd pay a buck or so to stand in back of the back of the theater and watch the New York City Ballet. You'd get tickets to look at the opera and be way up in the family circle for a very reasonable price. Outdoor concerts in Lewinsohn Stadium, interrupted by police sirens. Different religions. I remember one New Year's going out to a Coptic church in Brooklyn (now for us, Brooklyn was really far away) for a religious ceremony. Everything was there, anything weird or wonderful that you wanted.

Q: At Fordham, did you major right away, or did you figure what you wanted to do?

McCARTHY: I majored in Russian studies, and in part I think that's because in 1958 right after Sputnik there was an intense interest in Russian and a feeling that the U.S. needed to catch up. Fordham had a good Russian program, and the department wanted to experiment with offering language classes to high-school students. So, if students at Fordham Prep were willing to stay after school for extra language classes, they could take a shot at learning Russian. The university wanted to see how well high-school students could learn the language. I volunteered, and the faculty made it a very interesting and congenial experience. Lots of proverbs, not too stressful. I really liked the language and how it sounded and the culture as well.

Q: A beautiful language.

McCARTHY: It's a beautiful language. So, at Fordham University I took Russian and then majored in Russian.

Q: Did you have any time at Columbia University, which was sort of the preeminent Russian studies school in the country?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: When we had our yearly oral exams, there was often a Columbia University professor there on the panel who would quiz us in Russian. Other than that, I had no formal connections with Columbia.

Q: By the way, you started in 1960 at Fordham?

McCARTHY: Yes, at Fordham College.

Q: Did you get caught up in the Kennedy election, the Nixon-Kennedy election, at all?

McCARTHY: I was very interested in it. I wasn't out working the polls or anything that direct. But the election created a big stir. Looking back when you think of Quemoy and Matsu...

Q: These were two islands off the mainland China coast which there were debates on, which faded from view immediately after the debates...

McCARTHY: Yes. Then there was the "missile gap" and all that. Yes, I was very interested in that. Kennedy, you know, that whole time was...

Q: Did that at all strike a chord as far as public service?

McCARTHY: I don't think so. I do remember putting down the Foreign Service as a possible option in answer to the "What do you want to be when you grow up?" question on some questionnaire. But I hadn't really thought about it seriously. It was definitely not a specific trajectory that I had in mind.

Q: Did you know much about diplomacy or...?

McCARTHY: No, nothing.

Q: Most of us didn't. [laughter]

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Well, when I took the Foreign Service exam... is it okay if I jump ahead yet... or you'd rather I wouldn't...?

Q: No, go ahead.

McCARTHY: I was at American University here in Washington, DC, in the stacks of the library. I was a Ph.D. program in International Relations, and a classmate asked me, "Are you going to take the Foreign Service exam tomorrow, Bob" and I said, "Are they giving it tomorrow?" He said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, maybe I will." Then he told me, "Well actually, you know, you have to sign up about eight weeks in advance."

But I decided to call anyway. So I called up about the exam, and I don't know how this happened, but I talked to this wonderful woman who was going to proctor this exam. She explained to me that I was a little behind the curve, because, you know, people think about this months ahead of time. But she said that they did not a full house, so if I came down an hour early she would register me to take the exam. It was in one of the government buildings downtown. So I went early, she registered me, and I took the exam. What a wonderful act of kindness, stepping outside normal bureaucratic limitations.

Q: At Fordham, did you get involved in anything beyond Russian?

McCARTHY: I got heavily into philosophy. Read lot outside class, went to presentations and lectures, speeches at other colleges, took an evening course at another college. More than the norm.

Q: How about social life? I mean, you've been sort of this boy's/man's school trajectory. Were there significant others somewhere else?

McCARTHY: Significant others came about sophomore year in college for me, a little later than for some other folks. I was not exactly "going steady" but did have a steady girlfriend for a couple of years there. We also went to mixers at other schools. Someone would have

Library of Congress

a car and there would be a dance and punch. And the other big social event, using the term loosely, was the beer racket. It was very simple. You paid to get in, and that entitled you to as much beer as you could drink, so everybody felt they had to get their money's worth. Some of them were small, some were huge. Some ended with the riot police being called. It was a strange social custom.

Q: Well, you graduated in 1964?

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: So you went to Indiana.

McCARTHY: Indiana University, Russian language and literature.

Q: Well Indiana University was sort of the pre... I was just interviewing another man who, Harry Gilmore, I don't know if you know him...

McCARTHY: I know the name. He was in Belgrade too, wasn't he?

Q: Yes, he was in Belgrade too, and he went to Indiana because he wanted to take Russian studies. Did anyone direct you there? McCarthy: *No, I went to the library and researched it pretty thoroughly. Indiana was definitely one of the best programs in the country, and the course offerings looked best there.*

Q: Did Columbia interest you at all? Or you wanted to get out of New York?

McCARTHY: Yes, but I didn't like the courses as well, and I thought why not do something a little different? And also, you know, at that time you could apply for a national defense foreign language fellowship, which was very lucrative. You had your tuition paid plus about \$2200 to cover other expenses. It was a princely sum. I received one of those fellowships at Indiana.

Library of Congress

Q: What were they designed for?

McCARTHY: These were for critical foreign languages under the National Defense Foreign Languages Act. The goal was to support the study of languages where the government believed we needed expertise. The act encouraged study of those critical languages and the development of the strong teaching and research centers, where students could study.

Q: Was there any commitment, I mean once you did it?

McCARTHY: No, nothing.

Q: You went to Bloomington from when to when?

McCARTHY: I went there from fall of '64 to summer of '65.

Q: How did you find it there? McCARTHY: Wonderful. It just blew apart all my stereotypes about civilization ending at the Hudson River, and of this vast undifferentiated wasteland out there in the middle of the United States. I had all those New York stereotypes. We lived in a graduate residence center with students from all over the world, a great mix of people. And there was a huge concentration of ethnic Russians in Bloomington. In fact, Bloomington reportedly had the highest per capita concentration of native Russian speakers in the country at that time. Bloomington itself was small, after all, and there were all these special Russian programs. There was a large Air Force program to teach the language. The university had a special program for high school teachers who were taking a year out to retool so they could teach Russian. There was a big Russian history program and there was a big Russian language and literature program. All of that made it a very rich experience for a student.

And then I ended up with a lot of Korean graduate students, 3 or 4 Korean graduate students. We'd eat together and talk endlessly. There were fabulous performances at the excellent school of music, and professional touring groups played at the university

Library of Congress

theater. This was an eye-opener for me. The New York City Ballet performed, for example. Students attended, of course, but busloads of people also came from the small towns in the area. I was very moved by that. It was something that never occurred to me. I thought that these troupes would go to the big cities, but a town like Bloomington, Indiana never would have crossed my mind. Another striking feature of the campus was its natural beauty, especially those crisp, clear winter days with a blue sky and white snow on the ground. It was a wonderful time.

Q: What section of the Russian studies were you working on?

McCARTHY: Russian literature and language, with a preference for the language... I didn't have really firm career plans, so I was not about to specialize in, say the influence of early childhood experiences on Dostoevsky's prose style or anything that esoteric. Q: So you were there about a year, I guess.

McCARTHY: I finished my coursework there. In a year. I did not take the comprehensive exams that they gave after that. Rather I came back to New York and was supposed to go to the Soviet Union as a Russian-speaking guide on a USA exhibit "Handtools USA." However, the Soviets canceled it because of some dispute arising from the Vietnam War. At any rate I wound up as an executive trainee in a department store in New York and studied for my comprehensive exams. After passing the exams in January, I think it was, I got my master's degree. By that time it was '66 and I went into the service. I'd been in ROTC in college and had that military obligation to fulfill. That seemed like a good time to do it.

Q: You were in the military, what, for...

McCARTHY: Two years.

Q: As an officer?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes, as a second lieutenant, and then I rose rapidly through the ranks to first lieutenant.

Q: What did they do with you?

McCARTHY: I was in military intelligence. First there was infantry officer training at Fort Benning, Georgia and then intelligence officers school at Fort Holabird in Baltimore. Almost all graduates of those programs were going to Vietnam, many in their secondary MOS (military occupational specialty), as infantry platoon leaders. This was not a very pleasant prospect. Our particular group just got luck of the draw. The army had reduced strength so much in Europe, they had to divert one class to fill vacancies in Europe. Q: Well, now, were you tagged as a Russian specialist?

McCARTHY: Yes, yes. The assignment actually fit my capabilities [laughter].

Q: So, where did you end up in Germany?

McCARTHY: I ended up at the 513th Military Intelligence Group, located outside of Frankfurt, where I was involved in overt, as opposed to covert, collection of intelligence.

Q: Was this part of the Army Security Agency?

McCARTHY: No, the ASA had listening posts everywhere. This was different.

Q: What, talking to defectors?

McCARTHY: More like that.

Q: I wouldn't think there would be many in those days.

McCARTHY: I'm not sure how much ...

Library of Congress

Q: I take a rather blithe view. I was in the Air Force Security Service, so I went to the Army language school...

McCARTHY: Oh, Monterey. You must have loved that.

Q: Yes, it was fun.

McCARTHY: With the seals... were the seals there? *Q: Oh yes. [laughter]. Lots of fog.*

McCARTHY: A great school. Everybody raves about the school.

Q: After the military... were you married at this time?

McCARTHY: No.

Q: So, you've completed your time. When did you finish in the military?

McCARTHY: January 31, 1968.

Q: Just trying to figure out... were there any great crises or... while you were...?

McCARTHY: Yes, the 1967 Six-Day War. Troops were put on alert. So that was a crisis. There were always the drawdowns for Vietnam. Which was a preoccupation of the army at the time. I remember one discussion I had with my colonel. We were talking about Vietnam... I was very opposed to the war... and we had this very frank discussion. We disagreed, and he closed by saying, "Mac, I just wish you could see it for yourself. You'd think differently." And that's the last time that I ever mentioned the subject again, for the rest of my career. Please don't do me a favor and let me see for myself, I thought. [laughter].

Library of Congress

Q: [laughter] Did you get a feel for, there was talk of sort of a hollow Army because we were taking so much out and sending to Vietnam at the height of our engagement in Vietnam...

McCARTHY: Absolutely.

Q: How did you observe our military capabilities from your perspective?

McCARTHY: I had a limited perspective. I wasn't with troops in the field. We'd have a monthly alerts, and we'd get our battle gear and be prepared to do move. But I had no sense of overall preparedness.

Q: Did you get any feel for the state of morale. Was the enlisted man not being very happy?

McCARTHY: There were a number of enlisted people who were not very happy. The officers that I was with, a bunch of people my age who were either working on the same base or close to where I was, socialized together. Most of us came away, having respect for the military, for how they incorporated so many different people from different backgrounds, trained them, and formed them into functioning units. Somehow the Army made it work. On the other hand, we also relished the sheer craziness of the system, and constantly traded the latest anecdotes. So I guess my take was a bit of catch-22 theater of the absurd, concern that I was going to get killed in Vietnam, and the feeling of doing something worthwhile for my country. Finally there was this opportunity to be in Germany, to travel and see all different sides of life.

Q: Getting out in Germany and all this, did that sort of whet your appetite?

McCARTHY: Oh, yes. Frankfurt was a convenient jump-off point for travel, and there were great advantages to living in the city. At that time there was an area of Frankfurt called Sachsenhausen, where the specialty was the traditional Frankfurt alcoholic apple wine.

Library of Congress

It was bubbly and a bit tart. The little, informal restaurants had long tables with benches on each side. Old tables and benches, scarred wood. You'd squeeze into a seat on one of the benches, with other patrons on each side. You'd literally feel people pressing your elbows in. And you'd order this apple wine and food and there would be an accordionist and sometimes there would be a fiddler and people would just talk to each other and link arms and sing German songs. It was the only place in Frankfurt, which was a rather cold city, where everyone relaxed and chatted easily with strangers across a table. I used to go there all the time. It was my own German language school, and gradually you began to feel you were part of the Frankfurt community. You lived there, rather than just being stationed there.

I remember one instance, for example. There was a problem with my Volkswagen. I took it in to a garage, and when the service guy turned around, it was a fellow had been talking to the night before across the table in Sachsenhausen. "Oh, how are you?" He took off his blue jacket, went outside, took me in the car and said, "You know what you really want to do is just get it into second gear, jam on the brake, give it gas, jam on the brake, give it gas, jam on the brake... You had some dirt on the drum..." The car ran like a charm after that personalized five-minute session. That is one very small experience, but it illustrates how one begins to feel surprisingly connected to a foreign culture and a foreign place, even though you realize that culture is different from your own in many ways.

Q: When you got out of the Army, this would have been again, '68

McCARTHY: '68 in January.

Q: What were you going to do?

McCARTHY: I took what they called a "European out," which means you were released from the Army in Europe, and the Army agreed to pay transportation back to the U.S. if you returned within a year. So I spent a year in Europe. While I was still in the Army, I had applied to study French language and literature at the Sorbonne and that's where I

Library of Congress

went. There was a marvelous place called the Cit# Universitaire, which was very like an American campus, on the periphery of the city. There were no classes just residence halls, and many countries owned "houses." There was an American house, a German house, etc. You had your own room, and there was a little cafeteria, and you had access to all kinds of events that the various national houses would put on. I studied with a group of students preparing to be French teachers. That was for four or five months. That was the year of what the French call "the events."

Q: Yes, this was '68.

McCARTHY: This was '68...

Q: But this is May/June...

McCARTHY: Yes sir.

Q: And you were in Paris.

McCARTHY: I was.

Q: Tell me about it.

McCARTHY: I'd never seen those enormous, organized street demonstrations before. Seeing these 20-, 30-, 40-thousand strong demonstrations rolling along those large boulevards, with marshals and linked arms and chants, was a new experience for me. The whole city seemed to rock and vibrate. Just observing how crowds get organized was interesting. I remember being in one demonstration for the experience and then wanting to leave, and I discovered there was a coercive element there... The marshals did not want you to leave. I left, but it was definitely not a free-form demonstration, with people joining and leaving as it moved through the city. And there was the CRS, a type of riot police.

Q: They were tough.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: They were tough. Lots of ex-paratroopers from Algeria supposedly. And there was another unit composed of people who were bureaucrats most of the time. The word was they were angry people working behind desks who would be mobilized when extra police were needed. They were issued khaki clothing, shields, batons, and served as supplementary riot police. They went crazy when they got out into the street, as though a chance to mix it up was just what they had been waiting for.

Q: You might want to explain what the issues were. This was a very famous spring of '68...

McCARTHY: There were a lot of issues mixed together. It started off as an issue of university autonomy, curriculum reform, and visitor rules. One of the rectors struck a militant. There was a question of whether the authorities had the right to come onto university grounds. But that issue quickly evolved into questioning the whole structure of French society - equality under the law, class differences, and workers struck for better wages. For a period of time waiters on the Left Bank called you "comrade" when you went in to get a cup of coffee. I drove to Normandy at the time with a buddy who was out of the Army, and there were red flags flying over the factories along the way. The idea was to break down class barriers and have a society based on equality. There were various public fora where this question was discussed.

For example, there was what was called an open forum in the Odeon Theater, a very nice theater on the Left Bank. Thousands of young people were packed into this theater for a public discussion. There would be somebody down on the stage, and somebody far up in the balcony would yell out a comment or a question and he'd preface it with something like, "Mr. President, or Mr. Chairman..." Then the guy on the stage would say, "There are no chairmen here, there are no presidents... we are all equal." And then he'd go and put a little addendum to that, "But, in order that we can hear each other and we don't all yell at once, I - not a chairman, not a president - will call on people individually." You could see

Library of Congress

new ranks and status divisions emerging before your eyes and could see right away that this fantastical idea wasn't going to work.

But the movement went far beyond students. At one point the whole public transportation system of Paris stopped. So you have people driving in from outside the city and you'd hitchhike with them if you wanted to get anywhere. Some of those were sentimentally in favor of the students, and some of them were not. As a foreign student, I heard all sides. While waiters were calling you comrade on the Left Bank, you'd have counter-demonstrations around the Arc de Triomphe, with cars whizzing by with the French tricolour flapping out the windows. As the situation deteriorated, the big question was what DeGaulle would do. He gave an address to the nation, which was rather insipid, and then he was absent from the city for a while, as people speculated where he was and whether he was going to resign. He actually went to Baden Baden to talk to French troops. And that same time I had driven to Luxembourg to meet other army friends. On the way back, we stopped for gas, and the fellow who owned the gas station in this little town invited us into his living room to watch DeGaulle give his second speech, and it was very strong.

Q: He was in uniform, too, wasn't he?

McCARTHY: As I recall he was in uniform.

Q: Yes, I think he put on this uniform.

McCARTHY: Yes, the details are really vague to me now, but our friend at the gas station was very buoyed up by that strong speech.

Q: While you were doing this, were you pointed towards anything more than just a sort of absorb experience?

McCARTHY: No. I wasn't oriented to any particular goal. I wanted to stay in Europe. It was like a huge feast, like a table full of tasty items. Paris was a place to perch and a place to

Library of Congress

learn. I went to class, I did my assignments, I learned French. But it was also just a great way to live in a different culture, another society, meet the French, visit their homes.

Q: Well after this year in Europe, what happened?

McCARTHY: Well, after the year in Europe...

Q: Oh, Bob, before you get to that, how did from your perspective... did the demonstrations all sort of peter out?

McCARTHY: At a certain point, I left France. There were student-faculty meetings on reorganizing the university system, and I participated in some of those. One of our teachers who had studied in the United States was particularly interested in the views of foreign students. It was interesting enough, but I wanted to get on with my other plans. I went down to Spain for four weeks and then over to Morocco, and then back up to France, and then hitchhiked around the British Isles, then down to Greece, and returned to Germany via Yugoslavia. That took about six months. I had a tent and a Volkswagen with a bunch of books in the back. There were camping sites all around Europe, and you were constantly bumping into people from different cultures. I noticed that New York ethnic neighborhoods were often reflections of the original in Europe - fragments struck from the European block. You could see the relationships. So I didn't stay for the end. They even had some of us in...

Q: You came back about '69?

?McCARTHY: Yes, I came back... just before Christmas of '68.

Q: What did you do?

McCARTHY: [laughter] I didn't know what to do. I experienced significant reverse culture shock after that independent, multicultural experience. (End of tape)

Library of Congress

Q: Yes, you said you had this feeling of independence.

McCARTHY: Yes, but you know, friends - good friends - didn't really want to hear Bob McCarthy's musings on life. I mean, they wanted to hear your 35 seconds on Europe and what have you, but then were happy to move on to what was going on in the present. I knew I had to get a job. I applied for a couple of teaching positions and didn't get them. Then I tried employment agencies, and ultimately wound up teaching speed reading for a while. At some point I decided I needed to go back to school for teacher education credits so I'd have a certificate. So I got a job driving a New York City cab for a year, and I went to night classes at City College.

Q: What about driving a cab? How does that work? One knows that you have to purchase your seal or whatever it is.

McCARTHY: If you own the cab, you purchase the medallion. Not if you're a driver, working for a company.

Q: You just work for a company. McCARTHY: The company purchases the seal, the medallion. You just show up to drive one of the cabs.

Q: How about finding your way around the city? Did you know it that well already, or did you have to take courses?

McCARTHY: Yes, you had an exam. It was rather demanding. There were ten questions on the exam, like, "Where is the Empire State Building?" "Where is Yankee Stadium?" "Where is the Battery?" You had these ten questions and several weeks to study for them. And then you went into the exam room and were asked those same ten questions and were expected to know the answers. But there were people saying, "What's number 4? Jeez, this is a hard test. What did you get for number 5?" [laughter] So it's no wonder

Library of Congress

people get lost in New York. You didn't really have to know anything. I think it's a great deal better now.

Q: Yes, because I know if you want to be a cabby in London...

McCARTHY: Yes, oh, yes...

Q: They spend a year on a bicycle riding around on the streets...

McCARTHY: Yes, serious stuff.

Q: Learning the streets.

McCARTHY: And I think it's better now in New York too. But then it was... it certainly wasn't...

Q: Who's buried in Grant's tomb? McCARTHY: Yes, who's buried in Grant's tomb? That's the level of the questions asked but no duck and no hundred dollars. On the job you did learn a lot about getting around New York because your passengers knew the route from A to B, and you'd remember. And other cabbies would know things. I was an honest cabby. I took people where they wanted to go and I felt good about it. But there were lots of drivers who didn't... Cabbies did not like fares to Queens because they wanted to work Midtown Manhattan because the tips were better. So a lady would get in the cab and say, "I'd like to go to Queens." And the cabby would say, "I'm sorry ma'am, but did you see what the letter is on top of the cab?" "No, I didn't." "Well, take a look." And the passenger would look and it would be, say, M453. "M is foManhattan," the cabby would say. "You need a Q cab for Queens." Unfortunately there weren't any Q cabs, but it would be one way for a cabby not to go to Queens.

Q: After that experience, getting to know the great American public, I guess, where did you go?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Halfway through my cab-driving experience, I decided I needed to get out, so I applied to American University in International Relations, got a fellowship there, and started in 1970.

Q: And how long were you at American University?

McCARTHY: Three years.

Q: Three years. What did that lead to?

McCARTHY: Well, in part it led to employment with the Development Education and Training Research Institute (DETRI). It was a contracting arm of American University and had a contract with the U.S. Agency for International Development. For several years I worked there, interviewing USAID grantees before they returned home after training in the United States. They completed a questionnaire - how good the program was, how relevant, strong points, weak points, integration into American culture, changes in perceptions, blah, blah, blah, blah. After that questionnaire, we, the interviewers, conducted individual interviews for thirty or forty minutes. It was a chance to elaborate on the questionnaire, to get below the surface, and really understand what was happening.

Q: How did you find the American U. courses there?

McCARTHY: Very good. In fact, I was a little surprised it was so good. You had a good mix of students, for one thing. In the graduate school there were people who were full-time students like me and others who were employed in the CIA, Defense Department, State, or non-governmental organizations. So you constantly had this real world input into the classroom, and that, I think, kept the instruction on a rather high level.

Q: And many of the instructors were people working in the real world, too, weren't they?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Most of them were full-time faculty. At that time universities had not embraced adjunct faculty the way they have now. Even among the full-time faculty there were professors with recent experience in government.

Q: After you did... you say you sort of fell into the Foreign Service?

McCARTHY: Well I'd always thought about it, but obviously I wasn't thinking about it hard enough to inform myself seriously.

Q: I'm surprised because, you know, being in the Washington area... were you picking up things about the Foreign Service? McCarthy: Yes, I did pick up things about the Foreign Service, and there were people who really wanted to make the Foreign Service their career. My career planning was not that developed, though I did think I might take the entrance exam at some point

Q: I assume at some point... did you the first time pass the test?

McCARTHY: I did.

Q: Did you take the oral?

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: Do you recall anything about the oral?

McCARTHY: Yes. It was a good cop/bad cop/friendly guy in the middle scenario. The examiners asked you to pick some area of U.S. history or foreign policy, and they talked to you about it for half an hour or so. They asked questions and follow-ups. As part of the process, they tried to nettle you, or rattle you, with the hostile member of the trio being particularly aggressive. They wanted to see, I think, how you conducted yourself. Clearly, you were not entirely your natural self during the interview. I remember after the oral, the lead examiner said two things that I thought were a bit peculiar. He said "Bob, you passed,

Library of Congress

but I want you to know one thing..." Then he basically said that if I was coming to the Foreign Service as a member of the intelligence community, the State Department would find out. I thought that was a very strange thing to say. Then he said he noticed I had no sense of humor and hoped it wouldn't be a problem for me. Of course, throughout the oral, I was repressing any trace of humor so that I'd appear appropriately serious about being a diplomat. [laughter]

Q: [laughter] McCARTHY: Anyway that was the nature of the exam. It wasn't one of these in box exercises.

Q: So, when did you come in?

McCARTHY: I came in in 1973. I had taken the exam in 1971 or so. At that time, being on the roster was like having a terrific insurance policy. You had three years, I believe, within which you were eligible to enter the Foreign Service. They called periodically to say there was a new class of officers beginning at such and such a time, and if you were still doing your studies, you would say you were not free but were still interested.

Q: Was a Ph.D. in the offing at all?

McCARTHY: A Ph.D. was in the offing, and I passed my Ph.D. exams and whatnot. I'd intended to use the database at this DETRI organization where I was working to do an analysis of foreign-student attitudes. However, we lost the AID contract, and the database with it. Probably, if I'd really, really wanted to, I could have figured out a way to do the dissertation.

Q: '73 you came in. How was your A100 course? Do you have any impressions of it?

McCARTHY: I thought it was okay. State was faced with the challenge of bringing together all these people from so many different backgrounds, and giving them a sense of

Library of Congress

belonging to this organization, and a basic introduction to what the organization does and how it functions, and getting a little look at us in the process. I thought it was fine.

Q: And when they came around, where did you want to go?

McCARTHY: I wanted to stay in Washington because I still entertained ideas of finishing a Ph.D., and I liked the idea of educational and cultural affairs. So I went to the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs in Washington.

Q: Was there the offing to go into the state department Foreign Service or the information agency side of things?

McCARTHY: I don't think I even realized at that time that there were Foreign Service officers in USIA. I knew about USIA's touring exhibit program for the USSR, but my knowledge stopped there. I had even been accepted as a Russian-speaking guide on an exhibit but it was canceled. When a Department representative came to speak to us about the Foreign Service at American University, we were told the two cones where chances were the most openings - were admin and consular. I selected consular.

Q: So, where'd you go? You say you got an educational exchange...

McCARTHY: Yes, I was in the office of Private Cooperation for a year and a half or so, and then in the Office of East European programs. The office of Private Cooperation was an experimental office, designed to stimulate private support of exchange programs and encourage public-private partnerships.

Q: Did that go anywhere?

McCARTHY: What I concluded was that you really need a specific project, with which a given corporation or foundation, etc. wants to associate its name. This idea of reaching out generally wasn't too productive during the time I was there. But I was impressed with how much information was available on foundations, how many small niche foundations

Library of Congress

there are, and the extent of philanthropy in the U.S. It's a little difficult to cover all the information and tap into the right source of support, but the potential is immense. The non-governmental sector in the United States also impressed me. After I was in the office for two months or so, I was seconded to escort the mayor of Leningrad, and mayor of Kharkiv, and a Soviet exchange bureaucrat around the United States. It was a coast-to-coast trip covering a dozen or so cities to explore possibilities of U.S.-USSR sister-city relationships. Before that trip, I hadn't realized the extent to which these international visitors' councils, world affairs councils, and other organizations in American cities have the capacity to organize significant events, including hosting a rather important delegation from abroad.

Q: When you went with the mayor of Leningrad, how did you find that?

McCARTHY: It was intriguing. He was educated, smart, perceptive, extremely funny in a sardonic way, and very different from one of the other members of the delegation who was more skeptical about things American and much more dogmatic. The mayor of Leningrad would sort of set him straight. I remember going out to a pollution control system in a small California city. And by the way, the level of development in rural America would simply blow Soviets away. As you know, if you were out in the provinces of the Soviet Union, you probably had a muddy road, very few basic provisions, limited access to information, etc. Any way at his pollution control plant, the mayor of Kharkiv made some disparaging comment to his fellow travelers. I just heard it; the comment was not directed to me. The mayor of Leningrad rounded on him, telling him not to "tell fairy tales," and advising him to pay attention to what he was seeing. "It was also fascinating to observe how the delegation tried to project a positive image, and how unaware they were of some of the social customs. Sometimes the faux pas were really big. At times a Soviet embassy officer spent some time with the delegation and would have to intervene, in one case leaping in to interrupt an anti-Semitic joke a delegation member was just about to tell to his Jewish-American host. It was one fascinating vignette after another.

Library of Congress

Q: During this time, were you getting any training as consular, did you know where you wanted to go?

McCARTHY: That became a big problem. After the Office of Private Cooperation, I went into another CU office responsible for exchanges with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. So, by the time I went overseas, I had spent absolutely no time doing consular work during my first three years in the Department. An officer was basically on probation and had five years to cross the threshold and get tenure in the Foreign Service. So when my file came up for tenure consideration, my one-year in consular work would be compared to four years by others, my two years against their five years in several consular assignments. So, I was tenured in the Foreign Service by the skin of my teeth, at the very end of my five-year probationary period.

Q: Well, you went to Belgrade, from when to when?

McCARTHY: I went to Belgrade from 1977 to 1979.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you got there?

McCARTHY: Ambassador Eagleburger.

Q: Larry and I took Serbian together.

McCARTHY: Oh, God.

Q: We both went out there in '62.

McCARTHY: This is when he was involved with Macedonia and the aftermath of the earthquake?

Q: Yes. I went there, too. I was the officer who took a MASH group in the Seventh Army there, and Larry took engineers afterwards.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes. Was it right after the quake?

Q: Yes, well I was new to the consular section. I was there the next morning. A group came down... the British, and I think one or two other consular officers of other embassies... we took a convoy and went down there. What was the state of our relations when you got there?

McCARTHY: Relations were pretty good. As you remember, Yugoslavia was a big member of the non-aligned movement. It was communist, but had its own third-way house brand of communism. Yugoslavia wasn't in the Warsaw Pact. It was lying astride the Adriatic, blocking any of the Warsaw Pact access to the Mediterranean. One would have to go through the Dardanelles, past Turkey, a NATO member. It was liberal, compared to other communist states at that time. There was a lot more individual freedom; Yugoslavs could travel. As you remember, Yugoslavs knew what life was like outside. They had relatives, whom they could visit. Tourists could come to Yugoslavia and travel all around. Embassy personnel didn't need diplomatic notes requesting permission to travel outside the capital. So, relations were good. They were soured periodically, often by a dual national case. You know, someone would come with dual citizenship and would be drafted into the Yugoslav army while visiting relatives. But, in general, the relations were good.

Q: What sort of consular work were you doing?

McCARTHY: I started off on non-immigrant visas and federal benefits and then added immigrant visa work. From time to time I was involved in cases involving American citizens. I think the consular officer's position is probably the hardest in an embassy. *Q: Well, you tell a lot of people "no."*

McCARTHY: You tell a lot of people "No." In the space of a couple of minutes you're making critical decisions about their lives. You have to apply the law, of course, and the applicant has to convince you he'll return after his visit. You can't become cynical and

Library of Congress

refuse everybody or be a bleeding heart and believe everybody's story. You get lied to a lot, so it is easy to get jaded.

Q: Were you picking up any feel for the Yugoslav ethnic divisions and all that?

McCARTHY: Yes. There would be incidents at soccer games. People would tell ethnic jokes at the expense of others. You'd see the way the Albanians would be treated by many Serbs when they're working on the street cleaning crews. My wife and I traveled around Yugoslavia almost every weekend, went to every part of Yugoslavia, except the very southeastern corner of Macedonia. We saw differences and some animosities, but it was far from being a seething cauldron bound to erupt. People talked about the birth rate in Kosovo and the subsidies for Kosovo, and you'd go up to Slovenia and the Slovenians would complain that they were carrying the rest of Yugoslavia on their backs. Tito kept a lid on everything of course, and you were sent to prison on Goli Otok for nationalism. Still, a demagogue was needed to make those low-level feelings burst into violence. There was a certain level of prosperity when we were there, so people were not worrying about a shrinking pie at that time. So there was no great need for scapegoats.

Q: Well, you mentioned a wife. When did a wife appear on the scene?

McCARTHY: We got married just before going to Yugoslavia.

Q: What's her background?

McCARTHY: She's from Texas originally, and then the family moved to California. She went to school in California, graduated from Berkeley, was a health nutritionist, and then came to Washington to work for the Pan American Health Organization. We're both folk dancers, very into ethnic music, and that's how we met. In fact that was one of the reasons I wanted to go to Yugoslavia. Some wives might not see Belgrade as very alluring for their first overseas assignment. Marjie was really positive. For her it was the ideal place to go.

Library of Congress

Q: If you talk about ethnic things, just the tribal qualities there are wonderful.

McCARTHY: Absolutely. And folk festivals, and little off-the-beaten-path places where you can find traditional crafts still applied to daily life.

Q: Did you get any particularly memorable consular cases that you...?

McCARTHY: Yes. There was one automobile accident on the Autoput, the main highway from Greece through Yugoslavia to Austria. A lot of gastarbeiters, the guest workers in Europe, used to drive to and from Turkey that way. It was a long drive, they would get sleepy, and the cops said they would find bricks on the floor of a car by the accelerator. It was a form of cruise control; the brick helped keep a steady pace. Anyway, there was an accident involving an American and other people of several nationalities. I went to the morgue to corroborate the American citizen's identity. You'd think that you could look at photos and then identify the body. But by the time you factor in the embalming fluid, changed hair styles, passing years, etc., I found I could not be sure. A relative of the American came to Belgrade and made a positive identification. The body was shipped to the parents in Germany, and it turned out it was the wrong one. It was so anxiety producing for the poor family.

Q: Oh, God, oh, yes. McCARTHY: The family and I talked on the phone several times, and ultimately things were straightened out. Besides the human tragedy involved, it was clear that simple things are not that simple. They're not so cut and dried. Here's someone who knows the person, looks at the bodies in the morgue and says "Yes, that's her." And it's not.

Q: That's very sad. Yes.

McCARTHY: And the prison cases were sad too. The "representative payee" cases I always found very interesting. Americans of Yugoslav origin or maybe Yugoslavs who had worked in the United States often retired in Yugoslavia and received their social security

Library of Congress

payments. In some cases they were not competent to manage their own affairs, so a representative payee would receive the check on behalf of the beneficiary. One of us had to travel out and make sure that the person was alive, that the person was being treated well, and that as far as you could see, that money was going toward that person's well-being. These trips were often to "behind God's back" ("Boga za ledja," as the Serbs say). Someone in the village caf# would direct you to a remote area, and you'd walk out into a huge cornfield and yell out "Milane." And sooner or later Milan would answer back. He'd take you to the house. You would see the representative payee and talk with everybody. It was a small window on remote village life that you otherwise simply would not see.

Q: I know. What I did, I came back with bottles of Schlivovits, which I detested.

McCARTHY: [speaks Serbian] Domachi, domachi je.

Q: Oh, yes, "much better if we make it ourselves" which really wasn't true.

McCARTHY: I liked it myself.

Q: Did you have the problems of people coming from small villages in Macedonia to get visas?

McCARTHY: Oh, yes.

Q: I remember there was a town called Laboyno, and all these people wanted to go, in those days, to the Canadian Expo in Montreal. These are people who'd never been out of Macedonia and all of a sudden they wanted to go see a World's Fair in Montreal. You got good plane tickets, but none of them ever went to see the thing. What a mess.

McCARTHY: Yes, you definitely had that. And the hardships they would endure just to get there for the interview impressed one how hardy the Yugoslavs were in those days. Someone would be sitting in front of you, and you happen to know there was a major blizzard in their region. They have a baby with them, and you ask how they got to

Library of Congress

Belgrade. "Well," they might start off, "We walked five hours to," you know, some town... where they got a bus and then got a train. They would tell you all this, not expecting any particular recognition, but just recounting it in a matter-of-fact way. In a number of those remote places, their contact in the United States was often someone who had a restaurant, and a number of "waiters" just happened to be going on visit. All the while you are saying "no" to all these people, they were sitting there heavily armed. They probably didn't have a metal detector when you were there, but we installed one in the late 1970s. The first few days, before word got around, there would be this pile of guns and knives and daggers in the consular section...

Q: God, I never knew about that. [laughter]

McCARTHY: [laughter] Exactly, neither did I. And I'm thinking, I'm saying "no" to these people and they're sitting over there armed to the teeth.

Q: [laughter] Now I know.

McCARTHY: Exactly.

Q: What was your impression of Eagleburger's running the embassy.

McCARTHY: Eagleburger was great. He was politically astute, analytical, and could cut through all the excessive information. And he was funny, funny as hell. You remember.

Q: Right.

McCARTHY: Could be witty in a sardonic way, in a whimsical way. Very good with people. Relaxed them right away. You'd go to a meeting with Ambassador Eagleburger and somebody in the foreign minister and he was great. Later, when I was in Montenegro he came for the opening of the American cultural center, and the Montenegrins loved him. "Larry, Larry," they kept calling him. The head of the foreign relations department in Montenegro pointed with pride to a picture on his wall. There was an earthquake down

Library of Congress

in Montenegro and we sent in Hercules planes loaded with emergency supplies. The picture is of a plane being unloaded at Titograd Airport. The head of the foreign relations department is standing there with his hands in his pocket, watching, and Eagleburger has his sleeves rolled up, and is offloading boxes. And of course, everyone kids him about this, "You're standing there with your hands in your pockets and the American ambassador is working." The Montenegrins had a reputation for being very lazy. Matter of fact, during the earthquake, they said, "The Montenegrins are really rolling their sleeves up now." "Oh, they 'e finally getting down to work?" "No, they're lining up to get inoculations." To make a long story short, Eagleburger was a terrific ambassador.

Q: Yes. His wife, Marlene, started out as a consular assistant in my consular section. McCARTHY: Also great. Talked to everybody in the embassy. Great for morale. No nonsense, really practical.

Q: Oh, yes. You said while you were there you opened up a culture center?

McCARTHY: Yes, we had American centers in every one of the republics except Montenegro. They wanted a center, and Ambassador Eagleburger thought that we should be represented everywhere. This was our way of getting our message out to the Yugoslavs and hearing back from them. We had to finance it out of embassy resources. The embassy wanted someone from the existing staff to go down there, and I volunteered. I took the assignment as part of a transfer from State to USIA. By that time I realized that USIA work was more to my liking and was where I would be most effective. So Marj and I went down there, and for the first year I worked out of an apartment, on the second floor of a private house.

Q: In Titograd.

McCARTHY: In Titograd.

Q: Was it Podgoritsa, is it coming back?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: It was called Titograd then. It now has its old name of Podgoritsa again.

Q: The main street was Marshala Tita.

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: Always.

McCARTHY: Marshala Tita, indeed. We belonged to a folk dance group in Belgrade, and we used to sing songs about the marshal.

Druze Tito, mi tiSe kumemo. Mi ti se kunemo.

“Comrade Tito, we dedicate ourselves to you.” American diplomats in a Yugoslav folk dance group singing songs in honor of a communist!

So, anyway, yes, we lived in Titograd and at the same time we were constructing a center. My job was to go out and meet everybody, establish contact with all the major institutions, the key players in Montenegro, and oversee construction of the center - air-conditioner circuits, furniture orders, talking with construction crews and the city housing administration.

Q: Were the Montenegrins a different breed of cat?

McCARTHY: Yes, in some ways they were a different breed of cat. They had a very traditional mountainous clan culture, where your name and family history were very important. People knew what clan your were from, and every clan had a reputation. Ideally, though not always in fact of course, the culture put a premium on honor and your word as bond. You were supposed to be courageous and speak your mind, and there was a tradition of scholarship. An interesting blend. And Montenegrins are very tall people.

Q: Hawks, beak nose.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes, yes. There the custom of the corzo the evening stroll. You remember all those cities would have central streets blocked off, and people would walk up and down the streets, greeting each other during the corzo. There was, not exactly a swagger, but a confidence that the Montenegrins demonstrated in just the way they walked around that would strike visitors. After you lived there for a while, you sort of got used to it. But someone would come to visit from Belgrade and say, "It's like being in West Side Story or something."

So the point, coming back to your question, is that the Montenegrins didn't, even though Montenegro was a small republic, have any inferiority complexes. They had a lot of contact with the outside world. When they were a kingdom, you know, they had a capital up in the mountains in Cetinje, and we had a representative there until the end of WWI. We re-established that relationship with the American Center, our first official American presence since that time. The Montenegrins took this as perfectly natural. They weren't defensive, they weren't afraid, They weren't trying to put you down. We were just... equals... "We are a great people, you are a great people." That was sort of implicit in everything that happened.

Montenegrins were also extremely sociable and hospitable. So a meeting in the office... and in those were the days of "rakia" in the morning was very social. In my book closet I had Wild Turkey bourbon, homemade rakia, Johnny Walker scotch, and several other choices. It was considered really bad form if somebody came to visit you, even if it was 11 in the morning or 10:30 in the morning, not to offer coffee and a drink. You know, "But what will you have to drink?" The Serbs had some of that sociability too, but it was even more pronounced in Montenegro. You'd go into somebody's office on an appointment, and you'd be talking to the director of, let's say, a museum. You'd be talking to him and somebody else would come in. Rather than say, "I'll be with you in a minute," the museum director would wave him on in, and it would be sort of like the Johnny Carson Show. You know, the new guest comes in and sits a little closer to the host. The guy who comes in

Library of Congress

to fix the radiator comments on the cultural exchange program, gives me suggestions. I would feel free to tell him how to fix the radiator if I wanted. Other people arrive. Pretty soon you'll have six or seven people there, from all different walks of life, and everybody's business being conducted at the same time.

Q: Well, how did the culture center take?

McCARTHY: It took very well. There were some people who were against the whole idea. That was considered one of the most "Soviet" of the Yugoslav republics. There were some old guard there who didn't like it, but by and large people saw the center as a window to the outside world, as recognizing Montenegro, as bringing in lots of ways in which people could learn English and could be exposed to cultural influences from outside, as educational. We would have film evenings, we would have lectures. We would bring in Fulbrighters to talk to teachers. We'd have different events in the Center, and we'd take exhibits on the road. You know, you used to be able to throw those collapsible exhibits into the back of the station wagon and drive up to some mountain town and set up that exhibit, using special self-standing frames. We'd bring in lecturers on everything from arms control to urban planning and solar energy, and the Montenegrins would be very interested. You know, they're intellectually very curious. They have a tradition of education and scholarship, and we had very good discussions. And how could I even have not said this at the very beginning, the wonderful, wonderful local staff! We had the luxury of hiring from scratch and the top FSN there, Hilda Zakrajsek, was just superb. Very sensitive, well educated, bilingual, a self-starter, lots of ideas, and she was committed to improving conditions in Montenegro. Before I hired her, she already had a reputation in the republic, had accompanied delegations from their bank to international negotiations several times, and had been one of the top English teachers in the republic. So that was very good, too, and I guess she brought in a constituency. So I think the center was generally well received.

Q: Was there a University of Titograd?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: There was. Q: Did this amount to much, or...

McCARTHY: It wasn't one of the best universities in the country, but it was important for Titograd, yes. We had Fulbrighters there who had an impact. You had some English language people who were very good. It was mainly, as I recall, more a technically oriented university.

Q: Did the fact that you had a hunk of the shoreline, you know for summer traffic, did that make much of an impact?

McCARTHY: Oh, yes. The Montenegrins had an expression. If anything went wrong, if there was a complaint - for example, in the summer the water doesn't get up to the second floor, the heating has a problem, or whatever it happened to be - they'd say, [speaks Montenegrin] "Zato more je blizu" "But, for all that, the sea is close," meaning, there's a compensation: 45 minutes over the mountain, and you're at this glorious seacoast. So how could anyone really have grounds for complaint, when you consider that?!! There was a tourism industry on the coast, [laughter] but the service was a little alien to some of the Montenegrins at that time. It's the flip side of the coin of this clan mentality and emphasis on dignity, and equality, two people speaking as equals. The idea that tourists could put up their hands and say, "I want you to come here" or beckon with the finger would really rub them the wrong way in some of these establishments. So it was a bit of a tough haul to inculcate that ethos or service to tourists.

Q: How about immigration? Was there much of a connection with Americans, you know, with immigration and all that.

McCARTHY: Yes, a number of people had relatives overseas. There was quite a bit of communication back and forth. Quite a bit of visiting. There was the ferry to Italy too, from Bar to Bari. Some relatives abroad still managed to get out of touch. I remember one description of an uncle coming back with this big chest of hard-to-get tools (in his day) that

Library of Congress

were sold everywhere by the time that he got back with these things. He had a flash frozen picture of deficit items in his mind.

Q: Were you there during the earthquake?

McCARTHY: No, I was in Belgrade during the earthquake. Another officer and I went down there in a Land Rover to try to find information on Americans who were in Montenegro the time.

Q: Was there a rather quick recovery from the earthquake?

McCARTHY: Yes, fortunately it happened on the weekend, and as you see with all these earthquakes, there are pancaked buildings and everybody wonders what happened with the construction standards. You know, these floors just collapse on one another. Their recovery was pretty quick, although you still saw some of the ruins around some time afterwards. The roadways were disrupted, communications were disrupted, but they patched it up.

Q: Were there ship visits while you were there?

McCARTHY: Yes, but not to Montenegrin ports. There were ship visits farther up the coast. The Navy, as I recall, was experimenting with having our ships repaired during port calls, and having Yugoslavs working on the ships. As I remember, we were satisfied with the work. They were clearly putting very good people on that. An aircraft carrier came to the port of Split, and my wife and I happened to be out on the island of Khvar, opposite Split. We were sitting at an outdoor caf#, and had just ordered from the waiter. The waiter's friend came by and said, "There's a ship visit... unbelievable... 5,000 American sailors, etc." He did make it sound pretty interesting. Anyway, our waiter left then and there to take in the ship visit. [laughter] It was a big deal.

Q: Oh, yes, it was.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: And the consular workup...

Q: I think we are probably getting as close to a good time to stop here at this.

McCARTHY: Fine.

Q: You left there when?

McCARTHY: The date would be '81.

Q: Did you have any idea... Where were you going and how were things were working out for you?

McCARTHY: I was going to Moscow. I was very enthusiastic about it. I was going to be an assistant cultural affairs officer there. In those days, those assignments were taken very seriously. My public affairs officer in Belgrade was very supportive. He was an old Moscow hand...

Q: Who was this?

McCARTHY: Ray Benson.

Q: Oh, boy. Well Ray Benson, we had a long interview with him. He was what is known as a "red diaper baby."

McCARTHY: Yes, right.

Q: His family had gone back to the Soviet Union as a kid.

McCARTHY: Right. He also spent a long time in Zagreb.

Q: Yes. He was in Belgrade when I was there.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes that was his first time, I guess. Then he came back... When I was in Titograd, Ray was my PAO in Belgrade. Anyway, he was very supportive. He had been PAO in Moscow, while I was on the Soviet desk in the Office of East European Programs in CU, so I had known him a bit from that, and he knew that I knew something about Soviet affairs. But there was an obstacle that you had to overcome if you wanted to go to Moscow, and they really didn't know you. So I drove up the coast and joined Ray and the current PAO there, Pic Litell, also an old Soviet hand. It was a long lunch and quasi-interview, I think just to make sure I didn't have three heads or something. That worked out fine.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick this up in 1981 when you're off to Moscow.

McCARTHY: Okay, great.

Q: Good.

This is an interview with Bob McCarthy. Well, 1951, Moscow.

McCARTHY: 1981.Q: 1981, my God, yes.

McCARTHY: I do have a beard, it's true.

Q: [laughter] Okay, 1981. Have we gone into how you got that job?

McCARTHY: Yes, we did. I had just finished an interview with the current PAO, I believe, and with my Yugoslavia PAO. We had known each other, so it was more or less an audition interview. Because I hadn't been there before, it was considered a tough assignment. At that time, checking off the Moscow box was one of the way stations in the Foreign Service, as you know.

Library of Congress

Q: Yes. So you were there from when to when?

McCARTHY: I was there from 1981 to '83 in Moscow, and '83-'84 in Leningrad.

Q: *What was the status would you say of the Soviet-American relations in 1981?*

McCARTHY: Very tense. The Soviets had gone into Afghanistan in December of 1979. This was the time NATO was preparing to put cruise missiles and Pershing intermediate range nuclear missiles into Europe to counter the Soviet SS-20s. And a couple of years later there was the KAL airliner shootdown over Kamchatka. So it was a tense time. As far as our day-to-day activities, that is the activities of USIA were concerned, the cultural exchange agreement, which governed U.S.-USSR exchanges had lapsed because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. We did not want to renew those negotiations and accord the Soviets the respect and additional status that that would have meant. That put a crimp in a lot of what we did. Up until that time, we had sent large exhibits to the Soviet Union. They had Russian-speaking guides and reached otherwise inaccessible (except for short-wave broadcasts) areas of the Soviet Union. Exhibits would open up for six weeks or so. They would show an aspect of American life, and then the guides would answer questions about everything American. It was a way to get our message out. We had major performing arts groups coming through: Alvin Ailey, the Chicago Symphony, etc. They would play to packed houses; All of these activities gave the lie to the Soviet caricature of American society that was constantly portrayed in the Soviet media.

In 1981 those activities were not possible, because they required Soviet cooperation to book those groups into halls, etc. So what we tried to do was continue to get our message out, but use other means. The ambassador at that time, Ambassador Hartman, made Spaso House, the ambassador's residence, available as an ersatz cultural center. And we would do events there, nonstop. The ambassador just opened his residence completely. There was a special fund, private donations maintained by the State Department that was used to defray some of the costs. Large groups and small groups performed at Spaso. We

Library of Congress

would have invitations sent out to the elite, the creative intelligentsia. Sometimes people with political clout would come too, although they generally tried to boycott those events at that particular time.

Q: When did you arrive there in '81?

McCARTHY: I arrived at the end of the summer.

Q: What was the lean, you might say from the office or the American staff of the embassy of this new Ronald Reagan administration. It must have been viewed with a certain amount of trepidation, because he had been an outspoken anti-Communist, and very much to the right. What was the feeling?

McCARTHY: Among the staff... well now you're asking me to go back more than 20 years now and try to remember those atmospherics. Those feelings didn't leap out at me. I can say that. *Q: Well, that's an answer.*

McCARTHY: But there's something else, too, I think. To a certain extent, we take on the coloration of the countries we're in. And I remember somebody came to talk to us about some State Department internal policy. They said when they went to Turkey, everybody there was yelling and asking them questions, like "young Turks." And when they went to Moscow, people sat and absorbed it. The only thing they didn't do was rhythmic applause. [laughter] That's going way too far as an explanation for lack of trepidation, but there was just a little bit of that. Remember also, when you were in the USSR, it was very clear what you were up against. It was very clear what the nature of that society was. Nobody had any doubts. A phrase like "evil empire," I don't think, would have registered particularly strongly with the staff of Embassy Moscow, the way it would in Western Europe or elsewhere. It was true, though, one might have picked other words. I don't recall it as a big issue; let me put it that way.

Q: Okay. You mentioned the, what was the term used, "creative intelligentsia?"

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: I take it there's a distinction. You know, in France you talk about the intelligentsia. What did you mean?

McCARTHY: By "creative intelligentsia" I mean people who are creating works of art in various ways that affect people. So, at that time for example, theater was the most outspoken art form. It was less subject to censorship, less so than the movies or television, which were mass vehicles. So, the playwrights who were writing in the theater would come to events at Spaso House, let's say. And when you went to the theater in those days, there were lines that you knew would be spoken in a particular play and you waited for them. It was understood by everybody that even though this play might concern a dispute between relatives, the particular lines also had political meaning. Sometimes, when a particular line was spoken, you could hear a pin drop in the house. Silence. And then a buzz as people whispered to each other after the line.

Or poetry reading would be another example of that the creative artist affecting public perceptions. There would be readings where young people would read the works of Akhmatova, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva... poets who were not mainstream... but represented alternatives to Socialist realism. There would be candles on the wooden tables in front of the readers. There would be young people in the audience. Many people's mouths would be moving as though they were praying, because they knew the poetry by heart. The poetry - and the reading - was a form of spiritual sustenance. So, the creative intelligentsia in the Soviet Union at that time were able to represent people when they could not be represented in other ways. They could not be represented through the political system. It was an alternative way of expressing deeply felt beliefs, of maintaining contact with important Russian traditions.

Q: Was "samizdat" still there?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes...

Q: The publishing of Xeroxing or the equivalent of things that couldn't go through the regular publishing houses?

McCARTHY: Yes, you had some of that. You still had demonstrations that were spontaneous demonstrations that would be broken up immediately by plainclothesmen. The demonstrators would try to distribute material. You had magnitizdat, which is the tape recorder version of samizdat. And songs of people like Vysotsky would circulate, things like that. And there were publishers abroad, who published works that could not be published in the USSR, and one way or another people managed to become familiar with them. Some of that material would be read on the radios. The radios were extremely important. By "radios," I mean Voice of America, and Radio Liberty, which could reach large and remote audiences.

Q: Did we have any program of getting publications into the system from Moscow?

McCARTHY: We had American Illustrated, or "Amerika" in Russian, which was a glossy magazine in the style of the old Life Magazine. It used to be in over-large format the way Life was, and then it shrank down to a normal format. It covered different aspects of American life, complete with color photos, and the magazines were highly sought after. Like everything else, sales were regulated by intergovernmental agreement. There was a ceiling on the number of copies, number of exemplars per issue that you could have for sale. They would be sent around the Soviet Union and be sold at kiosks. In Moscow, you could go out to the kiosk when they were to be delivered, and there would be lines of people waiting for their copy of Amerika. You always had returns "unsellable" because there allegedly wasn't sufficient demand. But this was simply to make a political point. I think we estimated that every copy of Amerika went through ten readers or so. There were people who tried to save the entire collection. That was one way we put ideas into the system. There was some modest... we would give away books of course when we

Library of Congress

traveled... there was the Fulbright chair, de facto anyway, of American history at Moscow State University. But that's really more indirect. We didn't really have many ways to reach out to large numbers of people directly with print publications, though there were a few other specialized publications that reached small influential audiences. The radios were more effective that way.

Q: Was there a different life outside of Moscow as you traveled around? Exclude Leningrad at this point, but elsewhere?

McCARTHY: Oh, yes, it was much more remote, much more cut off, much more underdeveloped. That was one of the things that would strike Soviet visitors to the United States when they came on the International Visitor Program and would go out to Iowa or someplace off the beaten track. The fact that you could be living out in a small town and have access, pretty much, to the same types of food, the same types of clothing, the same types of appliances, the same types of reading material... was a revelation. Obviously, if you were in a large city with a huge library, you had more access, in the U. S. or anywhere else. But in the Soviet Union roads turned to mud in the spring, you wouldn't be able to get good consumer goods, you would not have access to information, etc. People came into Moscow for that. Yes, there was a big difference.

Q: On these receptions at the Spaso House and all, was this a place where you could talk? Did you talk?

McCARTHY: That was one of the great things about those events. You would find out what was going on. My job there was Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer for Performing Arts, and in the old days I would have been working with large American groups coming in. But, as it was, I was arranging events at Spaso House, and also reporting on the arts scene as partial barometer of what was happening, what was being expressed. You would learn all about that. It was a two-way thing. You would hear what was going on and your guests would hear from you and see some element of American culture. There

Library of Congress

was a range of events. There were jazz combos, for example Dave Brubeck or the New Orleans Jazz Ensemble. Jazz was considered a preeminent American art form then in Russia, and there was a large jazz movement. But we had other groups as well the New England Conservatory Youth Orchestra, the Yale Russian Chorus. In addition to that, we had movie showings. There was an agreement with Jack Valenti and the Motion Picture Association of America that we would get first-run movies. We had 35mm projectors set up in the back of the ballroom, and the agreement was that when those movies came in they were chained to your wrist from the moment they got there until the moment they left. No chance of a black market copy being produced. But we would show those movies and you would pair off with Russian guests and translate the movie as it was going could be embarrassing dialog to interpret sometimes. Those were wonderful events, really.

Q: What sort of feedback were you getting from the people. Was this just sort of 'here it is,' we're laying it out on the table, and just hoping something will happen?

McCARTHY: Well, the feedback from the people was not so much "there is what we are laying out for you, let's hope something happens," although a lot of people certainly did want something to happen. This was the time of what they called "zastoy," sort of a lethargy, a stall, under Brezhnev, where the leadership was stagnant. There wasn't much change going on and there was a dead hand of bureaucracy over everything. So bubbling underneath all this, in addition to the international scene, was 'what is going to happen post-Brezhnev?' People did want change. They wanted some sort of reform. A lot of people who went to these events and who had engaged us were simply enlarging their area of personal growth. They made a decision, "Look, I can just stay back and never contact foreigners or anything and sort of keep my name clear or I can decide I'm going to live in a fuller more engaged way and I'm going to go to these receptions."

When they came to these receptions, it wasn't just that they walked up to the door and entered the residence. There was a little square outside Spaso House, a little park. Well before a reception or embassy event, there would be people out there reading newspapers

Library of Congress

(even if it was pitch black - in other words, plainclothesmen would be out there) as well as militiamen. And the officers of the embassy would be out there, sort of like lifeguards on chairs. They'd see somebody out there beyond the surf in a little bit of trouble, and they'd go out there and sort of take that person, rescue that person so to speak... well, "rescue" is too big a word... but bring that person in. "There seems to be a problem with this invitation" the militiaman would say, so you'd have to go out and say, "Yes, this person is on the list" and take them in. And invitations would be deep-sixed if you sent them out to somebody at a particular institution where they worked; they might not get there. So there were very elaborate instructions for delivering invitations to particular people. You might meet a contact of yours on the street corner giving six invitations for certain individuals. You're always walking around with a pocket full of kopeck coins so you could use the pay phones to call people. In short, people who did this made a decision that they were going to expand their life and take whatever consequences there might be.

Q: What were you observing in Soviet cultural life? Was it vital, growing?

McCARTHY: Yes, it was a very vital life. Music was of extremely high quality. When they held the Tchaikovsky competition in Moscow, for example, and American performers performed, they always commented on the quality of the audience. Acoustics too, but mainly the quality of the audience, that feeling of understanding and support from the audience. I don't pretend to understand that, but performers who had good grounds for comparison would say that. Theater was very lively and very interesting. Playwrights and directors were always pushing the boundaries out a little bit farther. Ballet was good, not very innovative, but very, very good. There were some poetry readings around, still, as I said. I thought the arts scene, the cultural scene, was very alive.

Q: Did you notice, or was anybody remarking, because you were only there for a particular time. One thinks back to pre-Hitler's Germany where a really small, something like six percent, percentage of the population was Jewish. It was a salt in the German stew, you might say. The influence in music, in the arts, in movies, and literature was tremendous. In

Library of Congress

the Soviet Union you were having this leeching away, in a way, of the Jewish population into Israel and all this. Was this having an effect or was anybody ever remarking about that?

McCARTHY: I didn't notice any... there was that for sure... but I didn't notice any real leeching away of the creative juices. I didn't notice any wholesale departure at the top of these different professions. That wasn't something that I recall being remarked on.

Q: It wasn't being remarked on or anything like that.

McCARTHY: I don't recall that it was.

Q: Were you there when they had the Marine problem and all that?

McCARTHY: That was a little later. I had gone, by then, yes.

Q: How did you find living in the Soviet Union? Were you put upon, tried to be recruited, harassed or anything like that?

McCARTHY: You are always aware of that, and there was certainly a conscious effort to intimidate and it started at the very beginning. For me, it didn't involve anything physical, but let me give you an example. We had arrived in Moscow. We were living in an apartment away from the embassy; the foreigners tended to be clustered in apartment complexes with militiamen stationed in little booths outside. We were in a great, old merchant area of Moscow (Zamoskvarechiye") where you could walk out and be right in the heart of real Moscow. Something happened with the television set in the apartment. I turned the back of the television around and was fooling with it, figuring maybe just by luck I would hit upon something that would make the television work. And the phone rang. I pick up the phone and there's nobody on the phone. I go back and start tinkering with the television. The phone rings. Nobody on the phone. As soon as I touched the television

Library of Congress

again, the phone would ring. So I guess the people on the phone thought I was a little slow on the uptake, was not getting the message.

So the next time when the phone rang, I picked it up, and nobody was there, and I hung up again. But the phone continued to ring. The phone is hung up now, right? In its cradle, and just going, ring, ring. So they're telling me - this is the message for the less astute among us - that we know what you are doing, we are here. So I buried the phone under pillows and everything and it just kept ringing all night. Or, you'd be out someplace and the moment you came into the house, the phone would ring and there would be nobody on it. My assumption was that it was to sort of let you know that they're there. That type of thing. And you're always aware of possibly being approached. I never had anything that was definitely black and white. It's more you're always wondering why this person is telling you this particular information, why is he taking you to this theater production when he really doesn't know about the theater. So you are wondering, "Well, why, I wonder why" and you just sort of tuck that away in the back of your mind. And this is going on constantly, part of your internal processing. It gets into your veins so deeply that I recall being back in the U.S. and riding with friends in New Jersey, on a highway in New Jersey, and somebody asked me a question about my personal life. Something normal that friends would ask about. [laughter]

Q: [laughter]

McCARTHY: And I remember my stomach tightening up and thinking, "What an indiscrete question to be asking in a car (which could easily be bugged)!" [laughter] Now that's crazy, and I'd only been there two years, so you can imagine the self-censorship mechanisms that people develop who grow up in that culture.

Q: When you traveled, did you always travel in pairs?

McCARTHY: Yes, you always traveled in pairs. During that time there was even a rash of food poisonings of the defense attach#s, so they had to take samples of food back,

Library of Congress

just to make sure. So, yes, that was a problem. You couldn't travel alone.Q: I take it that Soviets would not talk about, you know, after Brezhnev... Obviously that whole regime was straffish, as you would say. They were all aging and you had the feeling that their minds weren't working too well. In fact, one wonders all about the Afghanistan invasion - it didn't make an awful lot of sense. But, did you get into any political discussions with anyone?

McCARTHY: With a few people, but generally people didn't bring that up. That was something they didn't get into. It wasn't as though they thought they were going to have a role in deciding whom it was, or determining anything, it would pretty much be somebody who was on the politburo and they wouldn't decide it.

Q: Well, in a way you were spared. Being in the cultural field, you didn't have to read Borba or Pravda on a daily basis.

McCARTHY: No, I didn't. Some of my colleagues did. And there was also a dissident account in the embassy. Officers had that responsibility - just what you asked about. You know, going out and talking to dissidents to find out their views and why they thought what they did. That was their political beat. The average person would not talk to you about that, thought some friends would.

Q: I was wondering, we put an awful lot of focus on dissidents, and I guess it sort of came with the territory, but how did you feel about this? Was this just sort of keeping the flame alive or it was the only game in town? Was this of any real importance?

McCARTHY: Dissidents is a big word. We are talking about major figures like Sakharov all the way down to somebody who is more junior. But a lot of people who were already in that category had made their decision on what was important to them in life and what risks they were going to run, and what consequences they were going to live with and they wanted to get information out. They wanted people on the outside to understand what was going on. Information would get into the external press, be reported on the radios, inform

Library of Congress

opinion. That was in their interest, too, so there was a mutuality there, I think, in a lot of those instances.

Q: What about newspapers, what reviews of plays in all this? Was this a political area at all, I mean reviews?

McCARTHY: Yes, well the reviews don't come out right away. It's not like the play opens and then the next day you go and see what the review is. There would be a delay and then something might be written up in "Literaturnaya Gazeta," the Literary Gazette. And depending who wrote it, it could be rather informative, but the real information on a lot of things, so many things, was word of mouth. You'd hear that there was a theater being closed down by the police. So you'd go over to the theater, and they'd invite you in, and you'd talk to them about it. You wouldn't read about it in the paper. Or you'd hear about a politically sensitive play and go to the dress rehearsal.

Let me give you an example of how information traveled unofficially. Gary Burton on vibraphone and Chick Corea on piano were to give a concert in the Composer's Union Hall in Moscow. This was a big deal already but they were letting us do this. It was a modest hall, there were no announcements in the papers, or anything, nothing public. But people from as far away as Vladivostok, on the Pacific, seven time zones away, heard about this and came. Jazz buffs, aficionados... because there is a network of information in any particular group you want to name that gets that information around. So at an unadvertised concert, there was a square full of people outside the hall, wanting to get in. The seats inside were already full up.

That same concert illustrates another point about how information gets around. Willis Conover had hosted a jazz program on VOA Radio for 30 years or so, a forbidden radio. He was in town at the same time as Gary Burton and Chick Corea, but nobody really knew about that. They knew about Corea and Burton through word of mouth. Imagine the scene. The hall is packed, they're expecting this performance by Gary Burton and Chick Corea.

Library of Congress

The lights go down, it's very dim. You see a standup microphone on the small stage. Now a figure walks out and stands by the microphone, and he says, "Good evening, ladies..." and that's as far as he got...the place went crazy! People standing on chairs, cheering, clapping. It was Willis Conover ...his voice so familiar for so many years, right there in Moscow. All the audience needed was a couple of words. And they were so familiar with the voice and loved it so much because of a radio (VOA) that had no official standing at all.

Q: Did you get involved in observing these, I guess they're called educational lectures or something...?

McCARTHY: Oh, God. [laughter] Yes. Particularly in St. Petersburg, the year after Moscow. They were called the Znanie Society lectures, the Knowledge Society lectures. And you would attend and it was so painful. You spent three hours and took notes on what the individual said and what the questions were and the general tenor of the discussion. And you'd do a cable on it. This was one way of reporting back what the Communist Party's popular outreach was on different issues. And you'd be in there on a Sunday afternoon and you could count on probably five or six hours of daylight that day, and you're spending three of them sitting there in the Znanie Society Lecture. That came up every five weeks or so in St. Petersburg on a rotational basis among Russian speakers.

Q: When you left Moscow, you went to, well we're talking about Leningrad in those days...

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: What was the difference from your feeling between the two cities? McCARTHY: On the one hand, St. Petersburg, Leningrad was more open, slightly more cosmopolitan... not more cosmopolitan, I'll take that back... more open to the West in a sense. But the authorities there wanted to show that they were more Catholic than the Pope. So they would harass the scholars and exchangees, and one of your responsibilities was counseling them, having them over, intervening on their behalf. I remember a consular officer meeting with a dissident lawyer, and when he came out of the meeting, the consular

Library of Congress

officer was assaulted, I mean physically assaulted. Again the administration was making a point.

It was a smaller operation as well. The real creative juices were flowing in Moscow in terms of theater productions and things like that. But you could do things. Our approach in St. Petersburg was similar to what we did in Moscow. We had the consul general's residence as a culture center of sorts. So, for example, we had a graphics art exhibit, curated by the State University of New York, in Albany. We brought it into Leningrad, professionally curated, labeled the works and hung them in the residence. This was Ray Benson's brainchild, by the way. We had special showings, and at any event in the residence - say Pearl Bailey - guests could also see the art. We had access to institutions there. Dick Callner, the curator of the SUNY exhibit, came and had a discussion/slide show for professional staff at the Hermitage on current trends in American art. As long as it didn't attract a whole lot of attention, you could do things. We had programs at the conservatory. We had what we used to call Cultural Ambassadors, Nancy Weems, for example, was resident there for some weeks and gave master classes. We brought in a judge to talk to law students. We could arrange all those things through the right contacts.

I would say it might be a little harder there than Moscow, and you didn't have quite the same support. It was a smaller staff, you know, one American officer, an American secretary, and several local employees to do the public diplomacy work, whereas in Moscow you would have had a public affairs officer, a cultural affairs officer, an executive officer, assistant information officers, and assistant cultural affairs officers. A big operation. And the Leningrad consular district was responsible for the Baltic states, of course. And there the difference was profound. When I traveled out to Lithuania, I visited a teacher-training institute and they with me normally, served coffee, and just chatted. By contrast, when I went to a similar institute in Leningrad, they were deathly afraid, as though I was going to reach across the table and steal their souls somehow. By this time, when I was in Leningrad, this whole intermediate nuclear range issue in Europe...

Library of Congress

Q: The SS-20...

McCARTHY: Exactly. The SS-20 and the Pershing/cruise missile response. Absent an agreement, NATO was going to install those missiles. So the Soviets were intentionally feeding the rumor mill that this was putting us on the brink of war, this was exceptionally dangerous, the Americans were crazy, Reagan was a war monger, etc., etc. So this complicated things.

Q: Who was your consul general in Leningrad?

McCARTHY: First of all, it was Bill Shin. And then Charlie McGee.

Q: Did we have much contact with students and faculties in either place?

McCARTHY: Yes, we had. And there was a tradition of that. Let me just back up a second. The exchange of students and young faculty members, Ph.D. students, began around 1959 or so with the er-university Committee on Travel Grants based at Indiana University. Soon the responsibility passed to another organization, the International Research and Exchanges Board, IREX, a non-profit organization. They administered this program that was funded through the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. There was an overarching U.S.-U.S.S.R. bilateral agreement that covered these exchanges, and every two years you'd sit down and negotiate a more specific two-year protocol. I participated in several of these, and it's very detailed and a bit tedious - how many visitors will we have, and how many performing arts groups, and what are the provisions for having somebody lecture?, etc., etc. All during that time we had contact with students and faculty, partly by virtue of the exchange program. When the bilateral exchanges agreement lapsed after Afghanistan, you would think, "Well, probably these educational/cultural exchanges will end, too." But they didn't. Everybody just looked the other way, and IREX continued to manage these exchanges of scholars and students, and in the Soviet Union we continued to be involved. Those scholars and students were in St. Petersburg/Leningrad, and they

Library of Congress

were in Moscow. Particularly in Leningrad, we had quite a bit of contact with them. We were trying to help them with their access to archives. We tried to cheer them up, invite them over, and give them advice. One of them may still be wearing my old U.S. army overcoat.

Q: At the time... this was a time of sort of almost the last gasp of the Soviet Union. Correct me if I'm wrong, but as I see it, the last gasp of the Soviet Union trying to make a major push toward the West with these intermediate-range rockets and all, trying to split essentially Europe off from the United States. In the Soviet Union, was there concern that this thing might get out of hand, or was this just another part of the old game that had been played for years?

McCARTHY: You mean concern on the part of the...

Q: Yourself, and also was this affecting, were you reading this into the Soviet populace?

McCARTHY: They certainly were more worried. The people who you associated with before were worried about conflict. Yes. So it did have an impact. And then every American visitor got a dose of this to bring back... People were genuinely nervous. This was a time of last gasps. You know, Brezhnev died, and the city closed down. There were lines of people going through the street. An army division was mobilized. And then you had Andropov for a while, and he died, and then you had Chernenko. I left before he died, but he was already, as you said in the "last gasp" phase. Last gasp is an appropriate term, since he had emphysema and he could hardly breathe when he speaking in public.

Q: I think it was Ronald Reagan who made the remark saying, "Why don't you have better contact with the Soviets?" "Well, they keep dying on us." [laughter]

McCARTHY: [laughter] The time of funerals.

Q: When Brezhnev went, was there concern? He'd been around a long time.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: It wasn't like the accounts you read of Stalin's death - despair, panic. When Brezhnev died, there were long lines of people to go into that trade union hall and observe the body lying in state. It was a major production. I was there for quite some time, since there was press coverage and we were working with the American press. There was also extensive television coverage...speeches....the actual burial.. But I don't recall any real concern.

Q: Well, you spent, what, three years in the Soviet Union?

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: And so, '84, whither?

McCARTHY: In '84 I came back to the States. I went into the Office of European Programs as Deputy Policy Officer. That was in USIA. That only lasted about five months and I then I became executive assistant to the Counselor of USIA. The Counselor was the senior foreign service officer position within the agency. He was a counselor to the director and dealt with problems that had not been resolved elsewhere, were inchoate, or had an interagency focus. At an early stage of development ideas often came to the Counselor for resolution, structuring, shaping, etc. It was a very interesting two years.

Q: So you did that essentially from '84 to '86?

McCARTHY: Yes, I did. From '84 to '86.

Q: Who was the counselor?

McCARTHY: The counselor was a great officer. Stan Burnett was his name. He was just terrific. He could conceptualize, he could communicate with people, he could delegate, he had trust and vision. He was a real boon to USIA and did a lot of things to forestall missteps farther down the road.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, this is during the Charlie Wick period, which from what I gather was both positive and negative. I think he was erratic, but what was your impression?

McCARTHY: Exactly. Yes, that was exactly it. When I was in the Office of European Programs, we were building up the European component of WordNet. Now this was a visionary thing. Charlie Wick put in a global television network based in American embassies. Way ahead of his time. Against much resistance, and there was a lot of broken china. It was forced through. You know, 'You have to take these two hours' you had to come up with something to use this time. But, ultimately, it was beneficial. For example, as you recall, after we linked the nightclub bombing in Berlin to Libya, we had an air strike on Libya. We decided we needed immediate access to Western European media to inform publics and help shape public opinion right away. We lined up WordNet and Secretary Schultz was on WordNet the next morning, early, with all the major media outlets in Europe, setting the tone. So, even though it was tough getting WordNet going, and a lot of people's noses were out of joint, it worked.

On the other hand, Mr. Wick had an insatiable desire for information, which ultimately could not really be satisfied. There was a system of missives that went out all through the agency with deadlines, and you had to respond to these little missives. They were known as Z-grams (from Mr. Wick's middle initial I believe), and they were on green sheets of paper. It was an art form to be able to conclude a Z-gram. You could never end it saying something like, "We'll keep you posted if there are further developments" or, "We will be watching this carefully." Phrases like that prompted follow-ups. A month later, you'd get, "What's the status now?" So, you'd have to say, "This concludes all action on this matter." He had a legitimate question: How do I figure out what is going on here I'm talking to people, and something stimulates me, and I have an idea and I want to get it out to the bureaucracy, and how do I do it? How do I really keep informed about what's going on? In the era of email, he probably would have been satisfied. I hadn't thought about this before, but perhaps he was a bit ahead of his time in that respect too.

Library of Congress

And budgets, did I mention budgets? I mean, that was a big deal under Wick. We got a lot of money.

Q: It's interesting how Wick... I give him great credit for getting money.

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: Apparently difficult to work for.

McCARTHY: Yes.Q: How did Burnett deal with him?

McCARTHY: One of Stan's great virtues is he didn't gossip about things like that. So, Wick could trust him. He could be a trusted interlocutor. Stan was not going to then run back to his office and delight everybody with the tales. He just handled it, whatever "it" was. He got along well with Wick. He was really a heat shield, or lightning rod. Choose your metaphor. He understood Wick well and set out to accommodate the director's wishes while absorbing the heat that often went with some of the Director's requests. Unlike some people, Stan did not radiate the heat on to those below him in the hierarchy. He isolated heat and content, and we dealt with the content. Stan dealt with the senior leadership of the agency, getting what Wick wanted in a way that was reasonable and had minimal ancillary damage.

Q: One of the things I found, speaking as a non-USIA officer, was that except for methods such as WordNet and all that, USIA in the Washington assignments would seem to be often quite unsatisfying because there isn't much to do with policy, with Yugoslavia or something like that. Did you find that? I think USIA has tremendous responsibilities once they get overseas. But in Washington, public diplomacy, as it's now called, doesn't play much role.

McCARTHY: Right.

Library of Congress

Q: Do you have that feeling?

McCARTHY: I think public diplomacy is more recognized now perhaps than in recent time. You can frame the issue the way you did, i.e. you could say that USIA did not have much to do with policy and therefore the work in Washington was not as satisfying. But you can frame it another way. You could say that the corporate culture of USIA is different from State's. It is not a spider web radiating out from Washington, where demarches are directed, items on which to report are directed. USIA had a more decentralized way of doing things. Washington knew what the objectives are in each country (we always had a yearly Country Plan). However, Washington relied on its public diplomacy teams at post to analyze the institutions involved, to see where the points of influence and possible dialog are, to shape resources to get what's needed, and then to request specific forms of support from Washington. Washington can disagree, of course, but there was a presumption in favor of the people on the ground.

Conditions varied greatly from country to country, and the best track to success was drawing on the expertise and knowledge of staff closest to the situation overseas. USIA had a flatter organizational structure, and there was more a give and take with Washington. In other words, the lack of control from Washington was a virtue rather than a handicap, precisely because it resulted in the best understanding, dialog, and advocacy where it counted - abroad. At the same time, I think some people who had political ambitions might have been frustrated in USIA. I found the management challenge in Washington - I was an area director later - amply rewarding.

Q: Well, in many ways, USIA officers, both in the field and back in Washington, being a small organization, have far more management opportunities than, say, a desk officer who might share with three other officers- (end of tape)

When you concluded this time, whither in '86?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: This was a great, great year. I got what we call an academic year. I spent it in Washington, and I took courses in a variety of institutions - Georgetown in Russian history with Professor Stites, a course with Dimity Simes at SAIS on current Soviet policy, a course in Communist political philosophy with Professor Linden at George Washington University, events at the Kenyan Institute.

Q: Wilson Center...

McCARTHY: Wilson Center. It was wonderful. The next semester I spent mostly at George Washington University doing East European study, where Professor Sharon Wolchek was a great help. By then I knew I was going to Hungary, so it was one of those perfect situations where everything made sense. The academic material relates to your ongoing assignment so you're motivated and you're thinking about practicalities as you go through it. The year after that I had Hungarian language training for 44 weeks and then went out to Budapest as Public Affairs Officer.

Q: While you were taking your academic year and you had these real experts on the Soviet Union, were you getting any inkling, or more than an inkling, of the fact that the bloody place was falling apart?

McCARTHY: Well, at the beginning of that time, it's hard to remember now, but one of the big questions was, "Is Gorbachev for real? Is he really a reformer?" People were split on that and then of course as time went on it became clear that these were dramatic, epochal changes taking place. So, yes, not so much falling apart, but that big changes were afoot. For sure.

Q: While you were in the Soviet Union before, were you picking up anything about the ethnic minority, not ethnic but the nationality, the nationalities were major divisions within the Soviet Union and keeping them in place might be more than the Soviets could do?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes. On occasion you would. It was particularly clear in places like Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia (though technically not Soviet) And you could hear it between the lines as people talked to you. Very, very clear.

Q: One of the things that is interesting... this wouldn't have been your field... but how were political, in particular economic people, looking at the Soviet Union in such great detail, and yet as I come back to my phrase, the place was falling apart. And people would come back, just visitors coming back from Des Moines, or something, would come back and say, the place just doesn't work. Were we seeing this, did one get to accept this as being just kind of the way it is, but this is all it's going to be together and it's really just a powerful place, or not?

McCARTHY: I think part of it was that you could not draw a direct line from the state of bathrooms in a hotel or the food service in a restaurant, or the availability of consumer goods to the status of the highest priority investments of the Soviet Union. Take, for example, anti-ballistic missiles, conventional arms, external intelligence, domestic intelligence. They were at a high level. Although one noticed shortcomings everywhere, there didn't seem to be strategic shortcomings. The control that existed and the fear that control could inspire made it seem unlikely the Soviet structure would collapse any time soon.

Q: How did you end up in the Hungarian program?

McCARTHY: I wanted to go to that part of the world again, and Hungary seemed like an interesting place. I didn't realize how interesting it would be. This was the opportunity of a lifetime, and I will never experience anything like that again. The people who were there at that critical time still remark upon it as being an incredible experience. In spring 1988 Janos Kadar has just been replaced as Party General Secretary. In the space of my four years in Hungary we went from a reformist communist government to the collapse of Communism, peaceful elections, a democratic government, and grappling with all those

Library of Congress

basic issues that affect a country making a transition from authoritarianism to democracy and full market economics. It was immensely satisfying to be there during that time and to have the resources to help the process along. It was like time-lapse photography. You know, usually you plan something, a long time goes by, you see a little bit come up here, a little bit there. In Hungary it was as though it was all telescoped, like those Disney films where they speed it all up and you see the flower come out and bloom and blossoms and the bumblebees come... It was like that.

Q: How did you find Hungarian as a language?

McCARTHY: A very complex language. A very fascinating language. If you like the New York Times crossword, for example, it would appeal to you. It's agglutinative, and when you glom on something, then other changes take place. It's like a little domino theory within a word. The language is similar to the Rubik's Cube, which was developed by a Hungarian, the same thing. I liked it. I liked it a lot. Still, it's on an intellectual level with me, unlike Serbian and Russian, which are more emotional for me. But it's a great language.

Q: What was your job when you went out?

McCARTHY: Public Affairs Officer (PAO).

Q: Could you sort of describe the structure of the embassy when you went out, and who was doing what?

McCARTHY: Right. When I went out there in 1988, there was an ambassador, Ambassador Mark Palmer; a Deputy Chief of Mission, Don Kirsch; then you had a political section that had two people; an economics section that had two people; science attach#; a defense attach# with maybe three or four slots; a modest admin section. Our USIA public diplomacy section was a PAO, a deputy and maybe six or seven Foreign Service National employees. And we were only in Budapest. We weren't anywhere else. We were all inside

Library of Congress

the embassy building on Szabadsag ter, a nice mansion of a building. In other words, not ready for what was going to happen.

Q: When you arrived, what was the Hungarian government like, and what was the status of our relations with them?

McCARTHY: Our relations were good. There were no major irritants. The USG had returned the crown of St. Stephen some years earlier. Again, this was the Gorbachev era. We didn't know how far reform was going to go, but Janos Kadar had just been replaced, and he was associated with inviting the Soviet troops to crush the 1956 uprising. There was a Communist reformer within the government, Imre Pozsgoy, who was considered sort of the great hope. The ambassador had a lot of contact with him, as well as with other elements of the government. It was a good relationship.

Q: Having gone through the Prague spring and even before that the putting down in Budapest of the Hungarian revolution, there had been these springing up things. A hundred flowers bloom and they get their heads chopped off.

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: Was there concern on our side that this might be in the offing, and by Hungarian contacts, too?

McCARTHY: Yes, that's an important question. After the 1956 uprising and suppression, there was a period where not much happened. But then around the late 1960s, 1968 or so, the New Economic Mechanism was launched. Economic reform was permitted in Hungary, permitted by the Soviets, I mean, as long as none of the holy of holies was challenged - the role of the Party, Warsaw Pact. People who had been involved in '56 below the leadership level were able to conduct research. They were in institutes. They weren't stoking furnaces someplace, as they did in Czechoslovakia. I don't mean to minimize retribution after '56. People were imprisoned, Imre Nagy was executed, etc. But still many

Library of Congress

Hungarians could continue with their research, as long as they didn't teach, and that was a difference with Czechoslovakia, I think. And there was this, I believe, self-restraint, this recognition that you can do things as long as you don't cause a lot of publicity. Hungary is not really on anybody's front page. We will just go along, making our economic system a little more like a functioning commercial system. And, very important for your question, Ambassador Palmer took it upon himself to be in touch constantly with the opposition. So you had young, highly educated Hungarians who wanted a new way of doing things, and he would have them over to the residence, he would even be out in the streets sometimes when they were marching. Partly that was, it seems to me, to show support for what we believed in and partly so that you wouldn't have these flowers, as you put it, chopped off when they're just starting to put their heads up.

Q: What was the role of the public affairs officer, and what sort of things would you do, when you arrive, because obviously we're going to talk about the changing environment?

McCARTHY: When I arrived, the first thing I tried to do was figure out what was happening. .What are the resources we have? What can the staff do? And what are the points that we can concentrate on? There's going to be reform, I can see that already. I wanted to avoid a scattershot approach and really make it count. What is the likely calendar of events so that our resources can come online when they really make sense in the Hungarian context and be welcomed and used. Where is the intersection of American and Hungarian interests where we can get the most bang for the buck? I would say that my predecessor had done a wonderful job putting USIS in position to play an important role.

Q: Who was that?

McCARTHY: Csaba Chikes was his name. Establishing great contacts with the media. The main television was across the street. Csaba knew everybody in the weekly news program, the daily news program. He took me around. Same thing with Hungarian radio.

Library of Congress

We spent time together before he left. That was terrific. I could lunch off that for a long period of time. So, initially, getting people, American visitors, on Hungarian television and on Hungarian radio and with interviews in the press to express support for reform was important. You know, opportunities for the Ambassador to do that were very important. Running the exchange programs was important. Bringing people in to talk to Hungarians. But those first few months were a feeling-out period.

And then I think the first thing we took on was in the legal area. There was a new Justice Minister, Minister of Justice, who was very reform-oriented. And he wanted to make changes. Among the changes he wanted to make was having a new constitution, and this was before the real changes occurred later. The contest was changes within a communist state. So, the Ambassador had him over and we worked with him and suggested a program of activities. We would take his drafting team, drafting the constitution, and send them to the United States. They would consult with experts, take a look at how a state's constitution functioned, look at the division of powers, look at what the courts did on constitutional challenges.

Through all this, it was very delicate because the Hungarians are highly educated people and you had to avoid seeming to patronize. You had to avoid seeming to saying, "We will teach you how to do it," because they weren't going to stand for that. So you would legitimately frame it as a chance to take a look at the American experience as you look at the other experiences because you are going to draw on and reject parts of what other people do. This was a chance to take a look at what we do in the U.S. We then proposed, or we talked about, a constitutional conference, sort of stimulated that idea. They did have the conference. We brought in an appellate judge and constitutional scholars to participate in that conference. At the same time, we worked with Hungarian book publishers to publish the Federalist Papers in Hungarian, to publish the American Constitution in Hungarian, works of political philosophy. These were then sold in bookstores and we also distributed them.

Library of Congress

Looking down the road a little bit, we put in place internships and fellowships for young, promising Hungarian legal scholars and practitioners who would go to the States and study, get a master's degree, Master of Laws, and come back. So we were working with Justice Ministry on what they were doing, working to prepare the next generation, providing the American experience to them, publishing materials that would be of use to all these folks and help shape the political culture, and supporting this constitutional conference.

Later on, we followed up on some specific things. There was a professor of law there who was not in our program, Professor Fletcher from Columbia University, who spoke Hungarian, and he was doing judicial training for people. So, we went down and attended some of those sessions and added on International Visitor programs for some of the best participants in those programs. We did moot courts where people would come in and do mock trials, and with USIA support, we had American experts participate in that.

And then way down, this would be a couple of years later, we had a person in the Ministry with a phone and fax and all that, and that person would field queries. If the Ministry of Justice wanted to take a look at some aspect of American legal processes, judicial processes, that person would field the inquiry and then send it to Columbia University where there were law students and professors engaged to help with answering that queries.

So that was one of the first things we did- law. We picked three or four different areas where we thought we could make a difference, which were in line with what we're supposed to be doing anyway. We're supposed to be telling America's story to the world. So here you had the most interested constituency you could imagine on this particular aspect of what the United States is all about. Very attentive, and with great influence in their country. In addition to helping them solve astonishing complex problems, we also had a wonderful audience for talking about the United States; and, by the way, people

Library of Congress

in the United States were afforded the opportunity to hear about what was going on in Hungary from the people who were shaping the legal system.

Q: Tell me about the legal system. You know, you have the common law, and you have the Code Napoleon. And, they are not terribly compatible.

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: I would think Hungary would fall under the code, rather than the...

McCARTHY: And this is one of the things that we were constantly talking to the Hungarians about: you might want to take some of the things that we offer and not other things. But when you are talking about a judge functioning in chambers, how the judge organizes the judicial calendar, how the judge disposes of cases, and what the jury system, jury trials are all about... all that is compatible. So, you're right. Not everything is applicable. And there are other areas like that, too, where... and the Hungarians constantly made that point to us.

Q: I think the overall point is that we were, you might say, proactive. We jumped into this thing right away, rather than doing the traditional diplomatic thing and sitting back and saying, "We note that they're making changes..."

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: In other words, there's a reporting function, and the other one is to roll up your sleeves and get in there.

McCARTHY: Right. And I have to say that Ambassador Palmer sort of set the tone for that embassy as proactive. Very much so. And Charlie Thomas, when he came in later, continued that. They were both very supportive of the public diplomacy activities, as was the DCM/Charge Don Kirsh.

Library of Congress

Another example. We knew that with changing regulations, there would be more small business development, that is, as these large, state-supported enterprises change, people would be starting their own firms, people would be looking for ways to make money when they couldn't make money the normal ways. So, working with the economic section, we focused on a small Hungarian outfit established to support small business. We helped them, sent the director to the States on the International Visitors Program. Then we heard about this wonderful woman, Katherine Marshall, who had left, speaks Hungarian, and was high up in the Small Business Administration of the United States. So we worked for about three months or so to try to get her to Hungary. We succeeded and USIA, bless its soul, bent a lot of their procedures so that she could come for a long stay, and that was extended for months. She worked with Agnes Tibor in this small business development organization to develop materials in Hungarian, run seminars, identify key people to go to the United States on programs, so that by the time this subject got up high on the Hungarian government agenda, we really had a lot in place.

Q: What about other countries? Were they involved in this? Germans, French?

McCARTHY: Yes. There was the British Know-How Fund. In fact, Katherine Marshall went around with the Prince of Wales for two days, advising him on small business development, which elevated her prestige and the prestige of our small-business operation immeasurably, and also provided good advice to the British. They were there. The European Union had the PHARE Project (Poland, Hungary Assistance and Reconstruction of the Economy, I think) to provide technical assistance. If you are looking at this in the abstract, you'd say, "The way to approach this is let's all sit around a table, all the donors, we'll decide what we want to do; we'll make what we want to do complementary; we'll achieve critical mass by combining resources; and we'll go forward with a plan." But in fact, the funding cycles are so different, and the EU has so many constituencies to satisfy... It has its own procedures and timetables. So, actually it's better to proceed and then make things make sense on the ground by meeting with people and trying to make things

Library of Congress

mesh... But yes, there were other countries involved. I don't think anyone was off the mark as quickly as we were. Now, I have to say, we weren't there with immense resources either.

Q: How about the non-governmental organizations? You know, the legal ones, there are all sorts of...

McCARTHY: Absolutely.

Q: How did that work out?

McCARTHY: We tried to identify good, non-governmental organizations that we could work with in Hungary. And we did. There was one called, DAC, Democracy after Communism, for example, that we worked with on legal matters, just sort of coordinated on issues. The SEED organization (Support for East European Democracy) was a non-governmental organization. And there were the non-governmental organizations that were involved from the United States. For example, the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute. Once we got into having elections, they were extremely good, coming in, working with the opposition parties. There were hotels, resorts, that were not used, they were off-season, on Lake Balaton. They'd bring everybody down - politicians, campaign managers - and they'd have a seminar for a week or two weeks. They did great, great things. They'd have the same expert coming back in who was very knowledgeable. And we would not try to compete with that. We would see that was happening and we would think that was great, and we would look ahead to where we could make a difference - After Parliament is elected, then what?

And so, in advance of the elections, we worked with Parliament on a parliamentary reference service, like a congressional research service, something of that nature. We got a good program going, partly because a flight was missed, a flight was diverted. The chancellor of the State University of New York and a small delegation were flying to Poland and their flight got diverted. So we met for dinner since they were in town anyway.

Library of Congress

They were talking about this legislative support program they had in Chile, run out of SUNY Albany. And it sounded great. So we explained what was going on in Hungary and that there were going to be these parliamentary elections and we'd need something like that.

And the long and the short of it is that USIA funded that individual - who'd done that Chile project - to come to Hungary and work with the parties, and work with the library that was attached to the parliament and get ready for this congressional research service. This, then, was followed up by an AID grant to SUNY. AID sent an American expert in to be resident for a year, and when our Congress, with Congressman Frost at the head, decided to have a big project to help east central European parliaments with information systems, we had something to build on and excellent contacts. So non-governmental bodies were important. There were other NGOs from outside, like the German Marshall Fund that were very active and very good. There must be others; none strike me right now. Our desire was always to include them.

Q: I can see where you would have a major problem in whatever kind of help we gave of our not appearing condescending or something like that...

McCARTHY: Right.Q: So much of what we've done has been in places where you really didn't have the intellectual reservoir that you could draw on in a place like Hungary.

McCARTHY: Yes, it permeated everything. And it's all in your attitude. In the Justice Ministry, there was a period there, where, a deputy justice minister initially was very cold to the idea of working with us because of that. But I think when they see your good will and you recognize their attainments, and they see that what you really are doing is compensating for the types of contacts that would have happened except for Communism, which limited these types of exchanges, it makes sense to them.

Q: Were you able to draw much on the fifty-sixers who went to the United States?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes, some of them would come back. I mentioned Katherine Marshall, and of course there was George Soros. Some of the political scientists would come back. And they had their own contacts, generally. So, it was more they would do their thing and we would talk to them about what was going on.

Q: What about the exchange program, which I guess we had for some years.

McCARTHY: Yes, that's right.

Q: Did you find that the Hungarians who had gone to the United States, been in the exchange program and come back, were they a group you could get together with. Did they prove to be a good source or not?

McCARTHY: Yes. You have excellent people in every field, pretty much, in Hungary. So you could choose very good people to go on the International Visitor program, academic exchanges, etc. The people who went on the Fulbright program were often heading up departments or in senior positions in the universities. And then we had Americans coming this way, of course. About this time, we had the Support for East European Democracy Act, the SEED Act, special legislation to support economic and political reform. So we were able to increase the number of Fulbrighters dramatically. Hungary had, at one point, and I still remember this number, 57 Fulbrighters, which was second in Europe only to Germany. We were lucky because Hungary was out in front. In '89 there was general revolution and a lot of these issues that Hungary was then facing became more common. But we had a head start in terms of calling on resources and having the leisure, in a sense, to think about what we wanted to do, map it out, explain our plan to Washington, and get those resources.

But the Fulbright program was very important. We dealt with the Fulbrighters all the time. We had brown bag lunches. USIS had moved, by the way. From this embassy we moved into a self-standing operation with the Foreign Commercial Service and into one wonderful

Library of Congress

building. We had a multi-purpose room there where we had a standing invitation, I think it was once a month, to a brown bag lunch for Fulbrighters, 12 to 2 on Wednesday, whatever it was. And we'd try to go, and if there was something we wanted to convey, we'd convey it, and if there was something they wanted to talk about, they'd talk about. What we tried to do was get Fulbrighters involved beyond teaching in the classroom. If someone was teaching in Budapest, we'd try to get them out to do a one-week seminar in a provincial university. If somebody was an expert in public administration, we wanted to get them down to a city that was talking about improving the way they administered the city. If somebody came on a short grant and looked good, we tried to convince them to apply for a full-year Fulbright, so they'd come back and be resident over the long term. So that was an extremely important element. The first Minister of Foreign Affairs was a Fulbrighter, for example. We were always trying to work with other institutions, so they could be partners with our exchange scholars. So that gets to your NGO question, but it also gets to the Fulbright program, because we wanted to have a bilateral Fulbright Commission. Ultimately, by the my fourth year, we had a binational Fulbright Commission to run the Fulbright Program, which meant that it didn't have to be run out of the U.S. Information Service.

Q: Well, as we watched this... This is prior to the events of November-December of '89 but earlier than that... Hungary was way out ahead, wasn't it?

McCARTHY: Way out ahead. They had this reform government that went through that first year. Then they decided on parliamentary elections. Now, Poland was ahead of Hungary in the sense that they'd had their election, but... I shouldn't say but. The Poles were out ahead so far in so many ways for this postwar period, but their election guaranteed a certain number of seats to the Communists in some formula. I forget the exact details, but it was a necessary accommodation to reality at the time. But the Hungarian election was completely free, that is you had a slate of candidates and you voted. I remember going out to the polling places, which was another memorable, memorable day... (oh to say nothing of the... let me just come back to the Germans living in Hungary. That was a big deal.) But

Library of Congress

you went around to these election sites, these little villages. I drove to six or seven little villages. The poll-watchers were there, the electoral committee was there, the urn was there, and the enclosed cabins. The people were as pleased as punch, just to be able to do this. And you'd talk to people after they had voted and they'd say how wonderful it was. And some old people would say they were voting for FIDESZ, which was the youth party, "because after all, we haven't been able to do too much, maybe the young people will be able to do something."

But in addition to, talking about being way out ahead in those ways, Hungary offered chances for East-West communication too. Lake Balaton was traditionally a place where families could reunite from two sides of the Iron Curtain. West Germans could drive into Hungary very easily with their campers and go to a campsite in Lake Balaton. East Germans could drive down to a campsite, and lo and behold they happened to be parked in the same campsite, and they would talk to each other. And that's the way they would meet or keep in touch. This would be I guess '89 that the Germans came down through Czechoslovakia, and...

Q: These are the East Germans.

McCARTHY: These are East Germans, wanting to emigrate via Austria from Hungary. But the border was closed. On the Hungarian side. When you went across those borders on those days, there was barbed wire, there were watchtowers, pits for examining the underside of vehicles. It was not an easy border. Hungary was permeable, but it had real borders where the roads crossed. And then the Hungarians decided they would take down the barbed wire fence. I still have a piece of barbed wire framed from that barbed wire fence. And it was announced on the weekly news program, Gjula Horn, the Foreign Minister, announced it on the weekly news program. And those Germans, who had been camping on church grounds in Budapest and at other locations, left and went into Austria. That was a major thing, and that helped precipitate a lot of the problems that East Germany had. You could say that was another way that Hungary was ahead.

Library of Congress

Hungary was also ahead, in a sense, just by virtue of how permeable its borders were to information and how much contact Hungarians had with the outside world. They had all these '56ers around. They would come back and visit. There was a lot of visitation. When you went to Vienna, there would be streets in Vienna where the signs would be in Hungarian. All the shopkeepers spoke Hungarian, because Hungarians used to drive out there for three hours, get stuff, and drive back. You drove across the border to Austria, and you wouldn't go a few hundred yards when you'd see these big containers, like the containers you'd put in the back of trucks and on ships, except they'd be in a field on the side of the road and there would be washing machines, and dryers, and freezers spilling out of the containers on the side of the road. Every other Hungarian car coming back to Hungary would have some big appliance strapped on the roof. Plus, Hungary is located right in the middle of Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia. Radio broadcasts and television broadcasts easily reached them. So they were very aware of what was going on in the outside world, which is another aspect of being prepared, advanced.

Q: Well, in a way, in your contact with the academic community, did you find a contrast with the Soviets? Were these much more sophisticated people in a way?

McCARTHY: I had more contact with them, so it's hard to make the comparison. I had more direct contact. It was easier. They were very sophisticated people. They were part of Western culture. There are the remains of a Roman settlement on the Danube just outside Budapest. They participated in the Enlightenment and the Reformation. In their studies, even though a course might be called Marxist Leninism or dialectical materialism or something like that, in some universities they would have read the Enlightenment philosophers. They would have read a lot of the things that people in the West would have read in those courses. The Hungarians used to say, "We're the only people who go into the revolving door behind you, but come out ahead of you." [laughter] Soviet academics were also sophisticated, and there is a great tradition of scholarship. The difference is more in the historical paths followed by the two countries.

Library of Congress

Q: When things started getting really tense, particularly in Czechoslovakia, where East Germans were getting into the West German embassy...

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: And East Germany was getting restive. I guess this is the Fall of '89, this was a pretty tense time, wasn't it? Because it could have gone the other way. How was this being played out in Hungary?

McCARTHY: Hungary was very, very supportive. They had reports from people who had gone out to those countries. But the big thing was Gorbachev. The big thing was the Soviet attitude toward all of this. And when it became clear that... earlier Kadar had said, the traditional line is, "If you're not with us, you're against us." And Kadar reversed it, "If you are not against us, you are with us." That's basically what the Soviets said. The Soviets said they were not going to intervene to save communist regimes in eastern Europe. They let developments take place. And once that happened, that was the big reservation on everybody's mind. And soon after that there was an agreement to pull Soviet troops out of Hungary. To leave those bases.

Q: During this time, really prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, were the Soviets doing anything? From your perspective, were they just caught up in events and watching things, or were they trying to put things back together again, in Hungary?

McCARTHY: In Hungary... my perch may not have afforded me the real bird's eye view on this, but I recall nothing that the Soviets were doing to try to stop this. The Soviets had immense problems with reform at home, of course. And sufficient problems with the United States on arms control agreements, which were a big deal. There was SDI, pressure on military buildup, so the resource question in the Soviet Union was a big one. The Soviets were trying to keep up the arms race with the United States, do reforms at home, and Gorbachev was trying to consolidate his position and think about whether what he wanted

Library of Congress

to do was consistent with an unwilling appendage... an empire on its borders. As I recall, this led to a hands-off attitude. There were all kinds of questions, about how to deal with the Soviet Union, e.g. about the Soviet Memorial and the Liberation Memorial, and what day should be celebrated as national day, and what about Revolution Day, and all kinds of practicalities while the Hungarians were going down this road. But I don't recall anything any major Soviet resistance. I remember the Soviets would be selling... Soviet troops would be selling gasoline, they'd be selling equipment...

Q: Was there at all the feeling that the Hungarians were surreptitiously arming if they have to go through another '56, or something like that? *McCARTHY: No. It wasn't at the level at all. Remember, it was reform Communism at first, with no real challenge to anything sacrosanct, and then Gorbachev approved of elections. Earlier, in 1988, there had been demonstrations in the streets - some of them in opposition to a dam between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, at Bosnagymaros on the Danube - and the police had intervened with truncheons. Times were tense then. By fall 1988, though, those demonstrations all went peacefully. The Hungarians commemorated 1956 with peaceful marches as well.*

Q: You know when you talk about commemorating 1956, there used to be a time when they'd commemorate 1956 with, "this is when the glorious forces of the Soviet Union helped us repress these dirty rebels." Was this a different commemoration?

McCARTHY: Yes. It's hard to remember now, but the big issue was how you referred to the events of 1956. The communist party had always referred to it as a "counter-revolution." Then in early 1989 Imre Pozsgay, the principal reform communist, referred to it as a "national uprising." This set off a fire-storm of debate, covered by the media. Popular sentiment was in favor of calling it an uprising, and this revisionism eventually led to the rehabilitation of Imre Nagy, another major event.

Q: Oh, yes.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: And they had, you remember the big statue of Stalin that was toppled in '56, you know they pulled down this huge statue?

Q: Yes.

McCARTHY: On Hero's Square, which commemorates the founding of the Hungarian state around the year 1,000, when Hungarian tribes came in from...

Q: *This where they have the guys on horseback ...*

McCARTHY: Yes, exactly.

Q: *Mustaches and beards... and look like a pretty wild group.*

McCARTHY: Yes, exactly. Magyars, they were horsemen. Absolutely. That's exactly the place. That's where they had the ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy. There was a coffin and coffins for others as well, as I recall, but it was mainly about Imre Nagy. The coffin was tilted up, and you could see it from all over the square. And the Hungarian tricolors, the Hungarian flags, were flapping everywhere. They had the Soviet hammer and sickle cut out, or gouged out, so you'd have a ragged, circular hole in the middle of these flags. That was the way flags had flown in 1956, and you had a line of people coming up to the square, circling the square and going by the casket and dropping in a flower. It was a coming to terms with the past. The ceremony was permitted but it was not governmental at all. It was on a major square, a square where there are many commemorative events. And this was a public reflection of what 1956 meant to Hungarians.

There was another great day, beautiful fall day, October 23rd, when the Republic was proclaimed. That was an anniversary of the 1956 uprising - so another historical reference and commemoration... A big flag hanging out the window of Parliament, and the whole square full of people, thousands and thousands, 100,000 people out there. I remember a

Library of Congress

police car coming through the crowd and I was thinking, "Oh, no, this is bad." But people just parted and the police drove through.

By the way, at the time, all these things were considered astonishing, like acknowledging the revolution, letting the Germans out, a public ceremony for Imre Nagy, who had been considered a traitor... he was executed, a new constitution, public elections. It was a door that was swinging open, bit by bit by bit by bit, and you tried to chock in some doorstops, or give it a little extra nudge every time, but nobody, or at least I did not think, that it would swing that far open with such far reaching results.

Q: Were there a bunch of apparatchiks who were going to be left out in the cold or was this a- (End of tape)

McCARTHY: They were, but they were discredited. The party at the very top had made the decision to reform. Everybody on the outside was supporting this and nudging it forward in different ways. This tendency was getting support from many quarters. The Hungarians had a big annual film festival, Budapest film festival. A number of the films had archival footage of what had happened in some of the small Hungarian towns in 1956. The past was being uncovered for all to see. Summer of 1990, July, President Bush visited. This was a huge gesture of support. (And by the way arranging the press support for hundreds of accompanying journalists was a major challenge for us). He'd been in Poland, and he came to Hungary. There were advertisements in the major papers, and I confess to having advised against the advertisements (You know, we don't want to sell the President the way we sell washing machines), and I was completely wrong. It shows how your ideas can be stale. The advance team wanted to put these advertisements in and they were right. It was a casual picture of the President with information on when he was going to arrive to speak at Parliament. When he came in, the streets were full of people with flags, in a drenching rain yet. And it wasn't a forced turnout, it wasn't one of these totalitarian state things where you, you know, this is your street corner, make sure you be there, here is your flag, wave,

Library of Congress

okay, go back to work. People really wanted to be there. So, the forces that didn't want change were minimal and marginalized.

Q: How did you find the media there when you arrived?

McCARTHY: The media were very open and they had some very good people in the media. We'd established very good contacts with the media through my predecessor, as I said. They had two weekly current-events shows and a daily newscast that were very, very good. The people had traveled to the West; the anchor who did the panorama show spoke English, spoke Arabic, was very well educated. The news people were very well educated. They'd been all around. Their coverage was pretty fair. Three major newspapers had correspondents in the U.S. They later came back to Hungary, and I knew them pretty well. It was good. Funding could be a problem. If the Hungarians wanted to do an important story from the U.S., for example, we worked out an arrangement with USIA where the Hungarian journalists could use a studio. We would provide studio access and an uplink for their program to bring it down in Hungary. USIA facilitated that. In Budapest, whenever there was a prominent American in town, whether it was Zbigniew Brzezinski, or Ambassador Eagleburger, by then I guess Deputy Secretary Eagleburger, or Ambassador Schifter on human rights, we had little problem getting them good television coverage. Our interests and the Hungarians interests were the same in that respect. I was quite impressed. The media were not controlled... This doesn't mean everything was problem-free, of course. There was an incident and I don't remember what they left out... It was a big, big deal at the time, but for my life I can't remember what the essence of it was. But the Ambassador did an interview, and it was published in the paper, but there was a key omission that made the Ambassador seem to be against some element of reform. We called back, and they reran the interview with the right words.

Q: Were the Hungarians beginning to play sort of like the Western press in... this is before the fall of the Berlin Wall, I'm dividing things off... In Moscow. Big things were happening

Library of Congress

of course. The Gorbachev whirlwind was in the mix. Was there frequent reportage, Hungarian-wise, on what was happening?

McCARTHY: Yes, there was. There was a letter written by... boy, it's a bit dim in my mind now... by a Russian schoolteacher protesting the reforms and it got a lot of play in the Russian press; the anti-reformers were backing it. That whole incident got extensive coverage in Hungary, to cite one example.

Q: But the Hungarians were well aware of events in Moscow, weren't they?

McCARTHY: Yes, very aware of events Moscow, and very aware that events in Moscow were crucial to their future. They didn't look to Moscow for anything other than permission, really. One of the great benefits of going from Communism to non-Communism in Hungary versus going from Communism to non-Communism in the Soviet Union is that in Hungary communism was imposed from the outside by the Soviets. You know, 'They did this to us. They laid this thing on us. If it weren't for that burden on our shoulders, we would be Austria.'" Hungarians tended to look down on Russia, even, I would say grossly underestimate the attainments of Russian culture.

Q: What about language? By the time you were there, were the students learning Russian more than English? How were things going then?

McCARTHY: It's interesting. Typical Hungarian sort of thing. Hungary had a lot of Russian teachers. They had a commitment to teach a lot of Russian. The way it tended to play out was that rural school districts had Russian teachers, but if you were in an area with a lot of well-placed parents, upper-middle class parents, you tended to have English teachers. And the English-teaching community was extremely open to us. One of the big problems they had was, "What do we do with all these Russian teachers, once students could choose what language to study. Nobody WANTS to learn Russian. People are taking Russian because it's the only language we give in some of these outlying districts," where there was no choice. So Hungary initiated a conversion program to prepare Russian

Library of Congress

teachers how to be English teachers. And, the English teachers at the same time, wanted to upgrade their skills and bring in new materials, etc. Our Regional English Language Officer (the RELO), a member of the USIS staff, was extremely dynamic, Greg Orr, and we would do things like: we would have a three-week seminar for key secondary school teachers down on Lake Balaton every year; key people from the university attended. We'd bring in experts from the United States and we'd put on an intensive three-week program, including American culture and things and information about the U.S. This was a time when we had "Family Album USA," which was a sort of a soap opera about an American family, the Stewart family, family-oriented entertainment, with language teaching, on Hungarian television. So, you'd follow this family through its day and the children and the wife and the shopping and the conflicts within the family. At the end, there would be a recap of some of the expressions. She said, "Get lost." What does this mean? Here is what it means. They'd go through idioms. It was very good. I mean, I used to watch it even. It was sort of fun.

So, yes, they did teach Russian; no, it was not wanted; they had to figure out how to deal with it politically. They were very open to us; this was great entree into the educational system. And, when the Peace Corps came in ... another "we're not patronizing" challenge, which took a long time. You know, the Hungarians would say "We are not a backwater that needs to have volunteers come in and teach us how to have clean water." So, the Peace Corps was there to teach English, to offer English-speakers, to help the school system. Our RELO went all around Hungary - We offered him up for six weeks - with the Peace Corps representative, while they figured out where these volunteers were going to go. Then those Peace Corps volunteers... what wonderful resources for us. They would use our materials and get materials into the classrooms. We also had English Language Fellows, USIA-sponsored educators with advanced degrees in English as a Second Language. The English Language Fellows were in the pedagogical institutes where the teachers were being prepared, whereas the great majority of Peace Corps volunteers were teaching in local classrooms. So there was a sort of a layered system. We would try to help with

Library of Congress

the Russian - to-English transformation program. Some of the Peace Corps volunteers were in that. I don't know that that really worked out exceptionally well... The Hungarians also had special high schools where... they always had schools where the courses were taught in English. They initiated what they called, "the zero year high school." They had a competitive test, and if you got in, you spent the first year on intensive English language study and then you took all your subjects in English. Under the Fulbright teacher exchange program we brought English teachers to go into those ultra-elite high schools and work on those programs.

And there were other special foreign-language schools in some of Hungarian cities. In some cases we arranged partnerships with American schools, and in other cases arranged to have American teachers placed in those schools. So in a variety of ways, they were very open to English, the American version of English, although there was some lingering prejudice against American English versus British English. The British council was there; in some countries it can be a competitive relationship; there, it was very harmonious, largely because of our Regional English Language Officer his excellent FSN assistant, who stressed cooperation.

Q: What about German? This is middle Europe and the theory has been Germany would sort of take... what was happening there?

McCARTHY: That's right. People of a certain age would often speak German. You could speak German with them. They were involved in business activities, and particularly close to the border there was a lot of joint business activity. As time went by, Germans became quite involved economically there. There were some people who wanted to learn German, but, you know, for a country like Hungary with a language that nobody else was going to speak, your key to the outside world was really English. That's really where your future was, and that was why they recognized it. Plus there was all the pop culture appeal.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, I think this is a good place to stop. I put at the end here, that Bob, we've covered a lot of your activities, but we want to now talk about the very tense time during, in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, in the Fall of '89, and how that was followed, and then what happened thereafter.

McCARTHY: Okay. Great.

Q: Today is the 2nd of April, 2003. Bob, just to reprise, what was your job that we were talking about?

McCARTHY: Public affairs officer in Hungary from 1988 to 1992.

Q: Okay, so we've come up to Fall of '89.

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: Was the Fall of '89, as it came from summer of '89, did you look upon this and say, 'Oh, we're coming to a momentous time', or how did you feel?

McCARTHY: I thought about this after our last conversation... My memory is of being impressed by what was happening in Czechoslovakia and Germany, knowing how important it was, but of being preoccupied with Hungary and sensing that Hungary was preoccupied with Hungary. I think there are a couple of reasons for that. One of the main reasons is that in Czechoslovakia and in the DDR at that time, there were bottom-up movements that forced political change at the top reluctantly. Big demonstrations that were repressed, got out of control, enlarged, and ultimately led to the overthrow of the regimes. Nothing gradual about it.

Whereas in Hungary, there was a relatively reformist Communist party at the top, and it was pushed from below by popular elements. And that party had done a lot. Those large

Library of Congress

demonstrations that we talked about last time, against the dam, the Bosnagymaros Dam, they permitted that. Even in September/October 1988, there was a huge demonstration that was not suppressed and the government suspended work on the project, even though it was joint Czechoslovakia-Hungary project designed to supply power to Austria.

Another example was permitting Hungary to recover its past. We talked about the Imre Nagy rehabilitation, but also, prior to 1989, on March 15th which was the memorial of the 1848 repression of the Hungarian revolt by Russian troops, there had been unofficial demonstrations. A stand-in for '56, really, and they were repressed. In 1989, in March, however, that march was permitted and officially sanctioned. You had 30,000 people participating in the official commemoration - almost like the Stations of the Cross, going around Hungary, stopping at landmarks. The opposition still did their own 100,000-person commemoration because they didn't want to be co-opted. Don't hold me to the figures. The point is that the attitude of the regime toward expressions of popular sentiments was different in Hungary. So that I think is one of the reasons that those events in Czechoslovakia and Germany, although important, didn't seem to be pushing Hungary along. Hungary had its own dynamic.

In fall 1989 we had the October Leipzig demonstrations and in November the demonstrations in Czechoslovakia. In Hungary we were coming to the end of roundtable negotiations that had lasted six months or so between the opposition, and the Communist party, and quasi-front organizations. They were concluding with a lot of changes recommended for the constitution, and a lot of changes regarding legality and governance and a host of other important changes. In September, as we discussed last time, Hungary cut the wire on the Austrian border. That was another example of Hungary sort of going its way, although it meant breaking a long-standing agreement with East Germany.

Q: Oh, yes. McCARTHY: East Germany had built a wall to keep people in, but the deal was don't let people out someplace else. But Hungary decided that its political imperatives required it to do that. So, coming up to that fall period, there were events in Hungary that

Library of Congress

were completely absorbing. On October 23rd, as we mentioned last time, the Hungarian Republic, not the democratic republic, the Hungarian Republic was established, 100,000 people out in front of Parliament. That's the time when the Leipzig demonstrations were very big.

Q: Did they do anything to the flag?

McCARTHY: Yes, changed the flag.

Q: Get rid of that...

McCARTHY: Yes, completely different. And there were endless discussions. Another example of something that absorbed the country. There were endless discussions about what should be in the flag. The crown of Saint Stephen with the tilted cross? Some representation of Transylvania, the green part, etc.? And, another preoccupation of Hungary, through that whole period, was the status of Hungarians living in Romania as a minority... one and three-quarter million or so... big demonstrations about that, too. The news that was coming out of Romania was magnified in Hungary all the time, Ceausescu was then trying to eradicate villages and establish large, industrial, agricultural cooperatives, and the feeling was that he was trying to eradicate Hungarian village life. So, any time there was an atrocity, or a priest was prevented from practicing, or a Hungarian language publication was suppressed, that was big news in Hungary. There was a large movement that kept that in the forefront, the Hungarian Democratic Forum, and they took part in the election later. Hungary was so intent on sort of...

Q: This must have given Hungarians talking to you an awful lot of pride... I mean, saying, "Look, we're doing away with this thing, and we're doing away in our way." For example, were you hearing any jokes about Hungarians versus Czechs, versus Germans, Romanians, and that? Because, often, that's the way these things are expressed.

McCARTHY: Right. No jokes spring to mind.

Library of Congress

Q: *Oh.*

McCARTHY: But, yes, people were extremely proud, and their point of reference wasn't Czechoslovakia or Poland. Their point of reference was Austria, their former partner in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. What they felt was, "If we hadn't been forced to wear this straight jacket, we would be where Austria is. That's our rightful place." Going back to what USIA was doing at that time, if I can put in a plug here, as its constitution was coming to fruition around October of 1989, we had already been working with the justice ministry since the Fall of 1988 on this. The drafters of the constitution had gone to the United States on the International Visitors Program. We had suggested some sort of conference and the Hungarians ran with that and made it an international constitutional conference involving a dozen different countries, including the United States and many of the Western European countries, presenting papers on the constitution. Frankly, I think the Hungarian interest was more in building up international solidarity for what they were doing, and drawing attention to what they were doing to stimulate it, than it was in learning. But, all through this process, there was enormous pride. One of the things from the standpoint of a U.S. government official, particularly in USIA, that you have to bear in mind all the time, was to avoid even a hint that you were patronizing or teaching. Everything was presented in terms of a joint effort, as it was, because people in the United States were extremely interested in learning about developments in Hungary. Hungary was on the crest of the wave there, until October or so, and events were changing so quickly that even specialists couldn't keep track. So in the context of all those joint things that we did together, there was enormous pride.

Q: How did you find your home office responded, because you must have had lots of requests for things. Because here is something opening up that we've been planning for throughout the... for the last forty years or so, but when the time came, were you able to get stuff out...

McCARTHY: The home office was great. They redirected money internally. And then we had the Support for East European Democracy Act, 1990 I think, and we had funds

Library of Congress

for that. For example, in 1991 or so, we had 57 Fulbrighters. Hungary is a country of ten million people, so that's an enormous input of resources for us, and, as I mentioned, those Fulbrighters, although they were teaching, were also encouraged to get involved in practical work as well, in their areas of expertise.

When we got to the elections, USIA came in very big again. They established two special chairs, one in economics/small business development, and one in political science and history. We had several Fulbrighters involved in important undertakings, like developing a civics curriculum for Hungary (a Hungarian Fulbright professor and an American Fulbright professor worked on that jointly. In fact the American expert Professor Joe Julian of Syracuse University, subsequently devoted a number of years to promoting civics education in that part of the world).

Another area where USIA provided exceptional support was in our effort to improve local governance. As the political system changed in Hungary, more power devolved to the regions and the cities outside Budapest. An American professor with extensive hands-on experience, Terry Buss, spearheaded our local government program. The model was roughly this: (a) visit a city, listen carefully, present an overview of what might be done, respond to specific concerns, and figure out the next important item on that city's agenda (b) provide relevant material to the city, develop a seminar/workshop in response to the most pressing agenda item for that city, and return to engage local leadership on that issue, including specialized expertise as needed. In essence this became an extended dialogue over several years. The basic framework was set at the beginning of the project, but one phase built on the preceding one, depending upon local needs. This outreach involved academic institutions, local government, and business representatives. It was highly collaborative and participatory. Keeping a project like that on track required a great deal of attention and flexibility from USIA, and our Washington colleagues really came through for us.

Library of Congress

So, in a word, USIA was very good. Our system was to have an annual country plan for each country, and every year I found I had to rewrite the country plan. Normally, when you redo the country plan, it's an edit... it doesn't change that much.

Q: As you move into late Fall, and things are really popping in Czechoslovakia first with the refugees, the people going to seek asylum at the Western German embassy, and then things started happening. In a way, that pressure wasn't there in Hungary, was it?

McCARTHY: That pressure was not there because free travel was already permitted for Hungarians, traveled back and forth. On one of those big days - think it was maybe the March 15th demonstration in 1989 - was also one of the biggest days for shopping in Vienna that anybody can remember. Half of Hungary celebrated, and half of Hungary went out to Mariahilferstrasse in Vienna, where all the storekeepers spoke Hungarian, and loaded up on goods.

But you had things that were going on that generated a lot of pressure. In October of that year, one of the big, big things was that the original plan coming out of the roundtable discussions was to have a presidential election immediately and a parliamentary election later. Two of the political parties rejected that. The assumption was that Imre Pozsgay, who was the lead, liberal Communist, would win the presidential election. In a way that victory would have legitimized the role of communism. But the SzDSz, the League of Free Democrats, decided that they would push to have the election for president postponed. They had a referendum campaign, and it was known as the "Four Egens" the "four yes's." The big "yes" was on postponing the presidential vote, and the people decided Yes, to postpone the vote. Once that happened, the parties had enough time to organize and to mount a real campaign, and we were able to provide election support.

So, that was another thing that was happening in that fall period. It wasn't that Hungary was just sort of coasting along on this gradual uphill trajectory, as everything else was

Library of Congress

exploding. There were moments that, in Hungarian terms, were extremely critical where developments could have gone either way.

Q: You say that you were giving out election support. This is kind of subversive, isn't it?

McCARTHY: Well, yes, in some ways. It was primarily the National Endowment for Democracy: the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the International Republican Institute. Each sent in people, and they also involved Europeans from party institutes. They did seminars. This was not USIA funded. They did seminars for people working on the campaign, but they did not back any one particular party.

What USIA did, as I recall, was send some of the party campaign managers to the United States on the International Visitors Program. Our preference was to do what other people were not doing. One of the big challenges in a place like Hungary, where suddenly it becomes hot and everybody wants to help, was, number one, pick an area that you are really good at and have a unique advantage and focus on that. Don't duplicate what everybody else was going to do. And, number two, get out of Budapest, because the people that fly in short-term are going to be limited to the capital pretty much. We worked with some groups in the capital, of course, but we focused on important regional centers outside Budapest, as I mentioned earlier, we worked on the parliamentary research capability more than on the election, while others worked in country on the election itself. We sent some of the staff from the Library of Parliament to the United States to look at what the Library of Congress did.

As its role expanded, Parliament was to use the former communist Central Committee building for itself. That was development that made Hungarians proud I remember walking through that huge, well not huge but large by Budapest standards, block building, within walking distance of Parliament. That's where we used to go for meetings with Central Committee staff. It was all very formal, designed to be intimidating. Then, less than two years later you walk through this building and it's absolutely deserted and you could

Library of Congress

actually hear your footsteps echoing through the halls as you walked, with, I think, people from Congress. You go to the old office that Kadar used to have in the olden days. You see this special elevator he had, just off his office that went down to the basement. On those occasions, people were very proud. These things just symbolized change so dramatically. Or, the first session of the newly elected Parliament, when it was seated.

That was another instance of, to return to your earlier point, people, bursting with pride with what they did. But in terms of was it subversive to offer election assistance, I think we were squarely behind reform and we wanted to do anything possible to make that election campaign work. The Hungarian government was behind the election too after all. There was nothing we did that favored one political party over the other. This was advice given to all the managers of all the parties, in a technical sense. The communists, never showed any desire to participate, so that question never came up.

Q: Were you all watching the Communist cadre, I mean the hardcore... hardcore might be the wrong term... the old apparatchiks digging in and seeing that their days are numbered, and what they were doing?

McCARTHY: Yes, not only we, but the Hungarian communists party - they called themselves the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party - watched that happen. The party actually reconstituted itself, renamed itself as the Hungarian Socialist Party. A small splinter group of those "hardcore" you mention broke off and formed their own Communist party. They participated in the elections and whatnot, but they did very poorly. The thing that you worried about with the party was, one, were they really going to reform and were they going to permit all the popular motion from below, were they going to accommodate it or at some point was it going to seem too threatening and were they going to try to stop it at some point; and two, what were the levers available to them if they wanted to. Under communism there was a worker's militia, "the Munkasorseg." They were formed after '56 and were subordinate to the communist party, potentially a clear threat. Another lever of control was communist cells at the workplace. That was a way to control

Library of Congress

things, like getting out the vote and who you'd vote for, and to relate awards at work to political support. The cells and the militia were dispensed with, as part of the "four yes's" referendum, and that really reduced options for the hard core. The bulk of the party, which had declared itself the Hungarian Socialist Party, were initially confident about the election. So, the struggle against reform was not in the foreground the way it was in Russia. You didn't know how far resistance to reform would go, but there were so many factors working against resistance, that at a certain point, it didn't seem that threatening. Unlike in Russia, a lot of reform was identical to nationalism.

Q: Well, now what about... I don't know what you call it... but the secret police and all? I assume Hungary had had a pretty solid core of these people...

McCARTHY: It did. It had a solid core of those people. That's another milestone in recapturing the past, dealing with the past, and presenting the past. The secret police headquarters at Andrashi ut No. 60 I think, was opened up. First of all, a memorial plaque was put on it, saying what it was, and commemorating people lost. Then the building was later opened up to the public (after I had left), acknowledging the role of the secret police. Just what happened to individuals who'd been working for the secret police I don't know. There wasn't the same frustration that you had in Czechoslovakia, where they'd publish lists. There was the search for the "red brick in the wall" - members of purportedly democratic institutions who were still "red." But there was surprisingly little retribution.

Q: How did this play out, then?

McCARTHY: It played out that the party reconstituted itself, it participated in the elections, the other parties participated in the elections...

Q: Elections were when?

McCARTHY: Elections were in the spring of 1990. And these were the first absolutely free elections in East-Central Europe. The Poles had an election that was almost free,

Library of Congress

and non-communists won any seat they were eligible to capture, so it was clear the handwriting was on the wall. But in these elections it was actually 100 percent. The Hungarian Democratic Forum won. The Alliance of Free Democrats and FIDESZ did well, and the Hungarian Democratic forum formed a government. The success of these parties demonstrated the importance of earlier permissiveness under communism: you could have groups outside of party control and you could have social organizations, citizens could collect signatures on street corners protesting Hungarian environmental policies. These same groups later became political parties and ran in the election. The Hungarian Democratic Forum, for example, had started as one of those groups. You were asking before, earlier, about samizdat, and things like that. The Alliance of Free Democrats was composed largely of urban resisters of Communism, who had written for samizdat publications earlier. Later these works were available openly.

The free availability of what had been samizdat was tracked as an indicator of freedom, of democracy. Publications that had previously been samizdat were sold in sidewalk stalls. Transcripts of radio broadcasts from 1956 were sold on the street corners. The study of the 1956 revolution that was conducted was printed and sold on the street corners. Translated works that weren't available previously were sold. Maps of a large Hungary, including Transylvania and parts of Slovakia, were sold on the street.

Q: How about pictures of people like Nagy and those absolutes, were they appearing?

McCARTHY: No hero worship, but figures, particularly Nagy on that June 16, I think it was, commemoration. His re-interment really, well, he was interred after the ceremony. Pictures of Nagy were everywhere that day. I still have one, a small flag with a picture Nagy. They came in all sizes and shapes. But there wasn't a cult of personality around anybody.

Q: Were you getting an overflow from Czechoslovakia and East Germany when the Hungarians opened the border?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes, but once the wire was officially cut, then it was really clear. But earlier, you already had groups coming into Hungary, camping, and then moving toward the border and going across the border. The Germans would try initially, as you said, you know, they're in the embassies... every person of German extraction was automatically given German citizenship then. So they'd try to get a document and go across. But then after a while they were just going across.

Q: How were the Austrians? Was there beginning to be a backlash about Austria getting the brunt of this?

McCARTHY: You'd think there would be, although I don't remember that. The Germans went on through to Germany, so I don't think they were considered a burden to the Austrian state. You know, they wanted to go to where they were going to be given citizenship - the Bundesrepublik - so that was where they went. Q: So that was the waypoint.

McCARTHY: Yes, the waypoint. It might have been. I don't remember

Q: You didn't end up with sort of an Austrian-Hungarian...

McCARTHY: Standoff.

Q: Standoff... Just the Austrians not being looked upon very favorably as the Hungarians...

McCARTHY: As I recall, any standoff did not last long, if there was one. But frankly I don't remember.

Q: How about the intellectual class? I assume there was one. Were they a particular point of focus of your work?

McCARTHY: Yes, not just individual intellectuals but the university community, book publishers, who reached intellectuals. We had a very active book publication program.

Library of Congress

Rather than try to print up books, ship them in, and distribute them, we tried to find win-win propositions with Hungarian publishers. And there were some very, very good Hungarian publishers. The arrangement would be something like this. "We will get the copyright for you. We will pay you a modest sum, say \$4,000 or something, to offset the cost of translation, etc. You can then print this book in up to 100,000 copies, whatever it happened to be... that would be very large, it wouldn't be that big... but up to some amount of copies. We will take back 400, which we would then use as presentation items or in seminars, etc., and the rest of the copies you sell and distribute to libraries."

And that would be aimed really indirectly at the educated class.Q: What kind of books were these?

McCARTHY: These would be everything from books on economics, Samuelson for example, to important works on American history related to what was going on, like the Federalist Papers, the Constitution; de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, to practical guides that related to the new challenges that people in that country were going to have to meet, like starting a new business, preparing a business plan, novels; science, Carl Sagan. What we wanted to do was present a rich overview of the United States and also try to include works that were particularly relevant to Hungary at that time. We were making up for lost time, in a sense. Of course, there had to be a market.

Q: The Soviets... were they just sort of standing back and shaking their heads? Or were...

McCARTHY: Well, Gorbachev had let everybody know that the Soviet Union wasn't going to intervene to save any of these regimes. The Soviet Union agreed to withdraw all its troops from Hungary by summer 1991, which they did. They did not like some of the disparagement of legitimate Soviet achievements, like the war memorial to the liberation of Hungary. So there were some neuralgic points, and when the Soviets left their bases, there was a lot of controversy over the environmental impact - what they had taken with them, things that were in the soil, and whatnot. I walked through some of those barracks,

Library of Congress

and nothing was left. But none of that played any role in trying to slow down processes in Hungary, as I recall.

Q: You were then until when?

McCARTHY: Until '92.

Q: Well, in this post-election period... what happened in the presidential election?

McCARTHY: *In the presidential election, Arpad Gonz was elected president. He had been imprisoned earlier, and then he reinvented himself as a translator and an author. A wise, gentle, astute person who was acceptable to all sides. He was elected and re-elected. Joseph Antall was Prime Minister.*

Q: But this was a defeat for the re-constituted Communist Party.

McCARTHY: It really was. And it depended largely on that referendum campaign to postpone the election date. By that time, you'd seen communism on the skids in politburos and parties in Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Q: Did you get any feel that the people in power were really running scared, or were they, maybe it was a Hungarian trait that they would go along with it... make the best of it?

McCARTHY: I don't recall any retrograde sort of resistance, any suggestion that any legal measures were going to be taken to reverse this. You had large, popular support, the reform party had participated in the elections, the world around was watching, Hungary wanted to come into the EU, did not want the Russian embrace. Everybody basically felt that the old arrangements didn't work, so what was the alternative, really. There wasn't any stomach, I think, for trying to establish anything by force. They'd just seen what happened to regimes that tried to hang on and they'd seen Ceausescu killed on Christmas day in Romania...

Library of Congress

Q: *On TV.*

McCARTHY: Yes, and Gorbachev was hands-off, so even if you were a dyed-in-the-wool Communist who didn't like what was going on, you wouldn't see any options for yourself. Q: How about with Romania? After Ceausescu left, Hungary gets reformed, but you've still got a million Hungarians living in Romania, what...?

McCARTHY: And whatnot. Exactly. That continued to be a problem, and there continued to be incidents, but Hungary didn't open up its borders and let a flow of Hungarian-Romanians in either, because there was an economic aspect to that. It's blurring in my mind but there were definitely incidents that inflamed public opinion in Hungary. There were bilateral meetings. (End of tape)

Q: *You were saying there were a lot of bilateral meetings...*

McCARTHY: Well, at least I can think of one big one. There were many issues to discuss, regarding Hungarian minority rights and how Hungary could be supportive without intervening in Romanian affairs. There was also concern when the Prime Minister proclaimed himself prime minister of fifteen million Hungarians, when everybody knew that only ten million resided in Hungary. The Hungarian Democratic Forum, which had a major platform plank on the Hungarian minority in Romania, was careful to say that didn't mean intervention. There were maps published, available on the streets of Budapest, that showed a larger Hungary that included the Transylvanian part of Romania as lying in Hungary. There was the government-to-government relationship on this, and there was the popular feeling about this since people had relatives and they were very close. All these were matters for bilateral discussion.

Q: *Well, is there anything else that we should cover that you were doing there?*

McCARTHY: Yes. This was the ideal opportunity for a USIA office to work. This is what you really pray for. You work for decades to try to introduce strands of information,

Library of Congress

freedom, communication, set up dialogs between institutions of the two countries, expose Americans to Hungary, and Hungarians to America, have some impact on the curriculum. And suddenly everything is reforming and the big challenge is to pick your targets and focus on them so you can continue to address them in different ways with different resources over time and not exhaust yourself along a thousand trails. That was one of the big advantages to having a bottom up/top down revolution, because you didn't have it reversed all the time. The Hungarians did it, obviously. But it was wonderful to help out.

In addition to what we've already discussed, I guess the only other thing that I would mention as being particularly important was setting up a network of six student advising centers in partnership with the Soros Foundation. Hungarian students were smart, well educated, and wanted to study in the United States but they needed to know what the opportunities were. A number of them got scholarships, using those educational advising centers.

Q: In '92, when you left this, having gone to probably the... sounds like in a way, a professional paradise...

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: Because very hard work, but something was happening, you'd been waiting for decades for this to happen.

McCARTHY: And as it was happening, you didn't know how far it would go. So you were really trying your best to do as much as you could in the time allotted. And everybody who was with us, everybody who worked in USIA, said, "That was a life- changing..." well, maybe not a life-changing... but "That was the experience of a lifetime."

Q: So, what happened to you? In '92? McCARTHY: *Then I went to Russia, from '92 to '95, as Public Affairs Officer.*

Library of Congress

Q: Now, this must have been quite a tremendous change, wasn't it?

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: In a way, you had some of the same things happening, but a huge country and all. When you went out there, what were you told would be some of your challenges?

McCARTHY: The challenge was partly just what you said. It's a huge country. You are going from a country of one time zone and ten million people, ethnically homogeneous, who have the luxury of putting all the blame on the Soviet Union, to a country that goes across eleven time zones, has 150 million people, lots of different ethnic groups, and in which reform is by no means guaranteed. There was an attempted coup the year before I got there, the attempted coup against Gorbachev, that was still fresh in people's minds, and all the arrangements were being worked out. The Soviet Union had collapsed just seven, eight months before I got there. So things were very much in flux, and you had reform from the top, but not really control over the situation. You had a lot of movement from the bottom, but not with the same track record that you had in Hungary and not with the same support. The big challenge was, how do you make an impact with your small staff in this immense country? At that time we were still suffering the effects of no Foreign Service national employees. The Foreign Service national employees for USIA were essential. They were real [a real asset].

Q: Absolutely. For everywhere.

McCARTHY: Yes. But there is a difference, when, because of classified working space, the FSN works in one place, and you are up behind a classified area. That's a little different from really working cheek by jowl and you pop into each other's offices all the time, you share work, you talk about things. There aren't many things off limits really that I can't talk to my FSNs about, you know. So, just to get back to my point, there were no FSNs. We had a contract with Pacific Architects and Engineers (PA&E), and their staff

Library of Congress

members were called PA&Eers. We had, I think, three of those in Moscow, and I must say they were superb, but there were only three. That was the year the Freedom of Support Act passed. So we had, about six months after I got there, something like \$100 million worth of exchanges money coming our way. So, the challenge for me as a manager was to conceptualize what it was we had to do, realizing that you couldn't retail things the same way as you could in Hungary. You had to look for big multipliers. Who could multiply things for you? Who could you work with who could then have an impact on others?

Q: Who was the ambassador when you went out there?

McCARTHY: The ambassador, when I first got there, was Ambassador Straus, who was burning up the lines to Congress about things like aid to Russia and everything, as you know, very, very well connected.

Q: I just finished up another session with him yesterday.

McCARTHY: Oh, did you? That must be the most engaging...

Q: Oh, it is.

McCARTHY: Oh. [laughter]

Q: [laughter] Wonderful, wonderful man.

McCARTHY: Oh, God. He would have these meetings with American correspondents, these sessions over in Spaso House. They'd be sitting in concentric rings, and he'd be a master. He'd keep them entertained and informed for 45 minutes to an hour of informal questions and discussions. It was great.

Q: You got to manage this. How did you approach your job? What do feel you were managing?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: A very large exchange program and extensive information outreach. And in connection with both I was managing relationships with a variety of intermediary organizations. This gets back to how USIA works, and again the tremendous support from Washington. The big USIA programs - International Visitors, Fulbright, special Freedom Support Act initiatives - are all carried out in partnership with non-governmental organizations. For example, for the Fulbright exchange, it's the Council on International Exchange of Scholars that does most of the implementation work on the exchange of scholars. The Institute of International Education that does most of the implementation on the exchange of Fulbright students. We worked through those organizations to implement exchanges on our behalf. Those NGOs were multipliers, bringing great expertise and commitment.

In Russia, prior to the fall of Communism, under the old Soviet Union, as I mentioned, we used to have a bilateral agreement on educational and cultural exchanges. There was a protocol that would go over two years, which would specify exactly what would happen. USIA had been working with some of those NGOs for years during the communist period. Now the numbers were vastly larger and the focus was on reform. But the USIA-NGO relationships were there and the expertise and hands-on experience were there on both sides. Other NGOs came on board as opportunities expanded.

So, what my colleagues and I did work with organizations that were managing exchanges in Russia, to increase their capacity by increasing their grants and by letting them take on additional staff to do work in Russia. And we were very fortunate, because the American alumni of the various exchange programs loved living in Russia. Anybody who studied Russia and Russian history in the Soviet era had this love-hate relationship with that country. There's just no way around it. They're drawn back to it like moths to the flame. And so someone who had spent a year there on an academic exchange leapt at the chance to go out there and work in an office of IREX (the International Research and Exchanges Board) or of ACTR, (the American Council of Teachers of Russian), or the

Library of Congress

ACC (the American Collegiate Consortium), and run exchange programs. Advertise them, get the applications, have national panels. So, our job was to keep in touch with those on the educational exchange side, keep in touch with those organizations, direct them, set the policy guidelines, and intervene as necessary. Some of their offices were outside of Moscow and that was all to the good. On the press side, it was a very, very big press operation. All the networks had bureaus in Moscow, as did the wire services and the major newspapers. You could have a camera crew on anything, not that they'd come just because you wanted them to, but they were there to cover real news. So, the ambassador's schedule, schedules of visiting delegations (we had congressional delegations all the time) presented opportunities. We had a Presidential visit the first January I was there, and another one later. We had the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, which meant at least one vice presidential visit every year. Lots of Cabinet secretaries all the time. In short, there were non-stop opportunities to engage the press, using the various VIP visits.

The ambassadors also generated press coverage. Ambassador Collins succeeded Ambassador Straus... He was the DCM and became the Charge after Ambassador Straus left. He was terrific also. He was a former exchange student there, in the late '50s, in fact I think he had roomed with the foreign minister. He was very attuned to Russian culture, Russian language, Russian history, was able to articulate our position very sensitively.

And then Ambassador Pickering came, another tremendous ambassador. So the leadership at the top was always excellent, which really helped, and the staffs there were very good throughout in all the sections. So, when managing the public diplomacy portfolio, you tried to work with your colleagues too - more multipliers. You tried to get out of the embassy and leave an institutional presence. One way we did that, and this was because of the Freedom of Support Act, was to establish information centers in some of the regional cities. These, again, were partnerships and were presented as partnerships. What we proposed was, "We will give you a small reference library, we will provide texts of recent journal articles on CD-ROM. We will provide Internet connectivity

Library of Congress

and student advising materials. You have to provide space, staff and staff salaries, and utilities. We will train the staff. And this will be a partnership. We tried this idea out in several places, picking regional centers, like Yekaterinburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, and Rostov. We succeeded in establishing these centers over the course of several years. It was complicated to do, and they illustrated our approach: "You can't get there yourself, so you have to work with others who can get there for you or with you." Erik Johnson, an Information Resources Officer who came to Russia later, expanded the number of centers greatly. They became known as "American Corners" and ultimately served as a model for a new worldwide program."

Q: Did you find the entrenched bureaucracy more of a problem there than you did in Hungary?

McCARTHY: Yes. Well, yes and no. I think it was a little harder "sell" to talk about openly-advertised merit-based competition where you identify the best and the brightest based on applications submitted from you know not whom and you knew not whence, and only when you see them do you realize that there are these diamonds out there. The going-in Russian position, because this was a system they knew, was that they should select candidates themselves. They wanted to avoid embarrassments. They said that we needed to get the best people, and the only way to do that was to use their knowledge and contact That would be the best "take" on their position. The worst "take" on it would be, "This is an old boy network, this is a good thing. People want to go to the United States; I want to be associated with it. This will be patronage for me, and I would prefer to remain in control of it, thank you." So that was a long haul, really, getting past that initial position.

But people whose hearts were in the right place saw that these competitions yielded fabulous candidates in a way that would have been possible in no other way, and the impact on the individuals and the individuals' locations and families was dramatic. You have a high school kid, in third year, out someplace behind God's back in Siberia. (Future Leader Exchange Program), backed by Senator Bradley, funded by the Freedom of

Library of Congress

Support Act.. The student would go to the United States, go to an American high school, live with an American family, and go back. And, people would say, "How did you do that? You don't know anybody. Your family isn't connected. You're like us." And that message, sent through those exchange programs was as important, I think, as anything we put out in written form, outlining American values and beliefs. The proof of the pudding was in the eating. We didn't just talk the talk. We walked the walk. Exchanges reached out into all 89 subjects of the federation, as they call them, all 89 constituent parts of Russia.

In sum, bureaucracy was frustrating in some ways, but the chaotic state of so many things including bureaucracy, opened up opportunities too.

Q: Did the collapsing nature of the Soviet Union affect you?

McCARTHY: Yes, I think it did. I think it influenced our approach. The big bucks were in the exchanges, and the philosophy was "You really don't know which one of these horses is going to be out in front at any given time, and you really don't know which is going to win the race. But you know that if this country is ever going to succeed, and if they are going to become some version of a market economy and some version of a democracy, they're going to need people who have a democratic point of view and are educated in key fields like business management, economics, public administration law, journalism, etc." Our theory was, "Select the right field, have an open competition, really get the word out, have an unbiased selection mechanism, select the best people to go into those fields, and ensure they have a worthwhile experience in the United States. They come back into important institutions, they hold democratic views, they rise up in those institutions; gradually, those institutions change. Those institutions are ultimately what the society needs, and the society changes with them. Again, it's only a part, a small part of what had to happen in Russia, or the other countries in transition, but it was an important part. We thought that our comparative advantage lay in that area rather than trying to retail a lot of individualized rifle shot programs, although, we did some of that, too. As I mentioned with

Library of Congress

regard to Hungary, exchange programs also let us engage the leadership of the future on issues of central importance to the United States and to Russia.

Q: How about the intelligence services? This thing had been honed to control Russian activities since the czars' time.

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: Forever. So, here's an old dog learning new tricks. You were messing around right where they didn't want any. Basically, the philosophy had been to keep foreigners from messing around.

McCARTHY: Except that the avowed policy of the Russian government was reform. Regional leaders, legislators would look upon this as a good thing when people came from their districts, had this exchange opportunity, and came back. I think the FSB, or whatever the intelligence service happened to be called at any given time, had bigger fish to fry than this. Remember, you had people coming in who were treasury advisors going into the Finance Ministry; they were building housing for military officers who came back from east central Europe. We were working jointly on a space program; we had Nunn-Lugar money to dispose of nuclear weapons. These programs had greater security implications. I think that would be more where the intelligence service would direct its attention. However, we encountered intelligence service interest occasionally, when the Office of Research did opinion polling outside of Moscow, for example. You'd get blowback on that.

Q: When you got there, it was all Russian, it was no longer Soviet.

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: How about the Russian media? How did you find dealing with that?

McCARTHY: The Russian media were mixed. There was just a tremendous variety in the Russian media. From the crusading, to the "let's try to get it right," to the "this is my

Library of Congress

little niche” to “I’m going to become completely irresponsible and just say whatever I want, in order to sell papers.” Our approach to the situation was this.. We supported an organization called the Russian-American Press Institute. It wasn’t called that in the beginning, though. It was located in the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada. My predecessor, John Katzka, had given them about \$5,000 bucks or so to set up a library. Then we gave them a small grant to build on that.. Then we got funding to bring in a professional-in-residence, as we called it, someone who is a professional media person, journalist, to work there in that American Press Institute and organize activities. Among the activities were cataloguing cases where journalists were interfered with, arrested, or anything like that; following press legislation - so sort of a watchdog function would be part of it. And they did seminars for the press. For example, we went to Nizhniy Novgorod, a very reform-minded city in the early days, for a 2-day seminar. The editor of the Moscow News went up. A correspondent for the New York Times, Serge Schmemmann, a great correspondent, Russian-speaking, went up. I went up, the professional-in-residence, Lisa Schellinberger from the Russian-American Press Institute went up. We addressed a number of issues relating to freedom of the press and financial independence. Then later, the Press Institute established affiliates in other cities and organized these same types of activities in other parts of Russia.

Something I forgot to mention in Hungary, which also applies to Russia, is the IMF, not the International Monetary Fund, but the International Media Fund, which was funded out of the Freedom of Support Act and SEED. In Budapest, they established a journalism center and donated a journalism library. That was very important. In Russia, the IMF would bring in highly qualified experts to conduct seminars. Rather than our having to do it from our end in USIS, again because our hands were so few, the Russian-American Press Institute would make the arrangements. We would work with the Institute on the concept. The IMF would get this great group of people. They’d come in, join up with some Russian experts, and do the seminar for Russian invitees. They did some of that also in Hungary, and they were great, very responsive. Marvin Stone was the director of that operation.

Library of Congress

On one occasion, in Hungary... if I can just skip back to show how responsive the IMF was. ... We'd had the first VOA, Voice of America, affiliate in East Central Europe. At one point this radio station wanted to break the agreement with us, claiming there was no way it could be profitable. Gene Mader, the VP or Deputy Director of the IMF, flew to Budapest on a couple days' notice. He brought a superstar on management of radios. With him. We sat down with them, worked out a programming schedule on what would make sense economically, etc., etc., and it all worked out. But that's the type of responsiveness we could count on. Again multipliers. That's one of the ways we dealt with the press.

We also gave small grants to media, to buy a modem, upgrade a computer, pay Internet service charges. There were internships for journalists in American media outlets (Jim Denton at Freedom Forum did an excellent job on that), and a lot of International Visitor programs. For example we'd take editors of several papers and they'd go to the United States as IVs. Not only would they have conversations with their professional counterparts, see how the press was run in the United States, but they'd establish links among themselves, even though they were in different regions of Russia and links with Americans. Again, sort of a small part of...

Q: What about, particularly Western Europe, how did you cooperate and work with them?

McCARTHY: There was a separate office in the Embassy to do that. and AID was in there, of course, after a while in a big way. There was a need to do just that. To keep track of what was going on Ambassador Pickering established an assistance unit in the embassy with four people in it. There was a computer program to collect and aggregate by category and region, and other dimensions, all the assistance being given by the G7 countries. On a day-to-day level, frankly, we cooperated in an ad hoc way, with others. For example, if the regional Regional English Language Officer was going to do a three-seminar for teachers of English in the Volga region, he would work with the British Council to do that, rather than compete with the British Council. They shared the load. But the idea of going out and trying to coordinate activities in advance, when there are different funding lines, and when

Library of Congress

resources come online at different times... different imperatives from host governments was more than we could even consider. So we didn't really do it, frankly.

Q: So, what about... thinking in particular the French and the Germans... The Germans had always had sort of a entree there despite the unpleasantness of two world wars, but Germany is part of that area in a way. What were they doing?

McCARTHY: They had Volga there, they had Volga Germans there too. Gosh, what were the Germans doing?... I know they were all doing things, but for the life of me when you ask me that question now and I try to remember back...

Q: Well, how about the French?

McCARTHY: [laughter] Same thing. I can barely remember what we did.

Q: I'm just thinking that both the Germans and the French... in a way, so much of this, I imagine, was done in either Russian or in English, and that would put them somewhat outside this...

McCARTHY: They had the TACIS program (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States, I believe), which the EU did in addition to what the individual member states did. They were doing things in business development and they were doing things in public administration. They certainly had exchange programs. They certainly brought people to Europe on visits, and we cooperated later on NATO, but by then I wasn't there. You would discover the impact of other countries programs in your travels. We set up reading rooms, and sometimes you'd go around and you'd find out that there was a German room, for example in the Linguistics University in Nizhniy Novgorod, and they'd show it to you. At the Library of Foreign Literature, in Moscow, run by a very dynamic, firm believer in democracy, Yekaterina Genieva, my predecessor had worked with the library to set up an American reading room. Later that was expanded to be an American Center... a really nice place with American books, several reference librarians, electronic access,

Library of Congress

meeting rooms. Then, using that pattern, Mrs. Genieva also developed a French center, a German center, a Japanese center, and an Italian center. So those things were going on, and we did influence one another. Resources were available to do things like that. The French tended to do more cultural activities than we did. Their cultural budget was larger than ours. But to give you a comprehensive overview of what the strategy of other countries was, I really don't have a clue at this point.

Q: What was the attitude within Russia at this time? Were you finding a whole younger class or older groups of people who were all of a sudden able to blossom forth? Were you impressed by this, or notice...?

McCARTHY: I was very impressed by this. When you entered a room full of alumni of this FLEX high-school exchange program, who had spent a year in the United States - and you know, I'd do that when I'd travel around... It was like plugging into this gigantic battery. You just got this inflow of juice and energy from them, and it was clear that these kids were terrific and that something good was going to happen to them. In the area of entrepreneurship, we had a program called "Business for Russia," later called "Community Connections." The idea was you'd identify small business people. Here the philosophy again was "Let's stay clear of the big policy decisions." We know that entrepreneurship is permitted; we know that in the United States small business provides most of the jobs. We know it's going to be important in Russia, too. God knows there are niches in the service industry all over Russia. That was one of the big problems. So we know there are going to be small businesses. Let's try to have a program where you identify good people in small business. They go to the United States; they work in a business analogous to their own, they live in an American community with an American family. Then after 5 or 6 weeks, they go back to Russia and they take what they want, discard what they want. They may see bad lessons, they may see good lessons. They'll learn something about it and they'll be practical. We started this off on an experimental basis, adjusted it, etc., and basically it came down to not advertising nationally all at once because it was too complicated. And we wanted to establish ties between a city in Russia and a city in the United States, so that

Library of Congress

over a 3-year period, you might have several delegations going back and forth. Ultimately, Americans would then travel to follow up. These visits by Americans were unanticipated, but they happened. So we'd take, say, ten oblasts, ten regions at a time. We'd advertise; we'd get applications. We'd screen them and then we'd have interview panels that would talk to them. Select them...And they'd go to the United States. These entrepreneurs were not young but, to return to your question, they also blossomed forth.

Q: These would be mixed panels, Americans and Russians?

McCARTHY: Yes. Mixed panels, Americans and Russians. And this was a surprise. We were told, and I sort of thought this might be true too, all of us were surprised. The conventional wisdom was, "Yes, when you're in Moscow, St. Petersburg, the European part of Russia, maybe the Pacific coast, you will find small business people who also speak English - because you had to speak English for this program in order to imbibe by osmosis what was around you - but one you get out past the Urals, you're not going to find people..." But it turned out that there were people everywhere, and they had the most innovative ideas. Somebody marketing scalpels by mail... they'd target people. They'd send them one example of their product by mail, for free. And they'd say, "If you like this, get back to us." Marketing steel doors, because crime was a big, big problem. All kinds of people came out of the woodwork, so there was ample work for the binational panels.

So, yes, I was very heartened and surprised, by how widespread interest and ability were in Russia. The program for young professionals, called The Muskie Program, identified young people in law, young lawyers, people starting out in business after having a degree, journalists for graduate study at American universities. They were super and the American universities gave us great reports on them. So people were able to "blossom forth" in different ways. If you think about alumni of USIA exchange programs in Russia, it's like a pyramid, and it's all geared toward finding those people that we just mentioned, the people who are going to come out of the woodwork and be the new generation in Russia. At the bottom of the pyramid you'd have the high school kids, then you'd have high school

Library of Congress

teachers, then you'd have college students, then you'd have graduate students, then you'd have young professionals, then you'd have professors, and then at the apex of the pyramid if you like you'd have senior scholars and regional leaders and directors in different sectors of Russian society. The layers of the pyramid were interlocking.

Q: Were you having the problem that I was told existed in some places, it certainly did in Africa and all, that colleges and universities in the United States were sort of professional grant type things that took... whatever you want. This how they supported their grad students, not necessarily to the welfare of the country to which they were sent... these were often sent to African countries and mostly aid things. But I was wondering whether this crept in, of people coming, and they knew how to write grant proposals, but essentially the contribution was to do surveys or something that would serve the universities and not the people to whom they were serving.

McCARTHY: Right. There were a couple of problems that these countries faced when they were democratizing rapidly. They'd get all kinds of people coming in, not just universities... think tanks, private organizations... they would portray themselves as having resources, and just wanting to consult on how to use those resources best. In fact, what they were doing was getting material for grant applications which they were going to launch from a zero base of experience, and try to get money and go where the action was. The organizations in Hungary or Russia would spend a lot of time with these people because they'd think they were funded, but they were really just there on spec.

As far as the other points you mentioned - just coming and not wanting to do too much - we didn't have... Our programs weren't really set up so much that way. We had speakers who would come in, but they would be identified by USIA. We would have groups from NGOs that would come in and be linked with local NGOs, but they tended to be okay because the grant proposals would be run by the post first. So you would screen a pile of proposals. You'd see an organization listed and you'd think, "Boy, I'm surprised if anybody's contacted them." And you'd ask, and you'd find, "Oh, yes, somebody said..."

Library of Congress

somebody signed the letter, but we don't know what it's all about." Or the message from the American partner might be: "Don't you worry your head about this. Just sign here and we'll take care of the rest." There were quite a few pro forma agreements, so you really wanted to see some sign of prior contact between these two organizations that were going to have a partnership before you really gave it your blessing. I think, relatively speaking, we didn't suffer too much from that, mainly because most of it was competitive and individually based, and most grant money for institutional work went to the American partners, which were used to auditing requirements.

Q: And were you sort of keyed to watch for this, too?

McCARTHY: Yes. Several things in the Hungarian experience I took with me to Russia and that was one of them, for sure.

Q: This was a time, talking to Robert Straus yesterday, a time sort of analogous to a time when our robber barons were out there...

McCARTHY: Yes. [laughter]

Q: In the United States, the railroads, it was all out there for the taking, and in the long run, it worked out, but [laughter] it took quite a while. You know, the Vanderbilts, the Morgans. This is certainly going on in Russia. How did this affect your work and your impressions of it?

McCARTHY: You are absolutely right. You had a vacuum where once there was centralized power. Nothing is there, and you have democratic forces rushing in. You have crime rushing in too. Extortion, shakedowns, carving up cities into regions, payoffs, kickbacks. We would have experienced way more of that in our programs if we had been giving grants directly to Russian institutions. But mainly, we either had most of our money within these individualized grants or working with these partnership organizations where our contribution was in kind, like books or computers or Internet access. Or, it was a

Library of Congress

grant given to the American partner, like an American university to work with a Russian university. So the temptations that direct grant money might have been posed to the Russian side weren't usually there just because of the types of programs we had. But the potential was everywhere. It influenced what we did. For example, when we sent our computer equipment to Yekaterinburg to set up the information resource center, it was on a truck together with other computer equipment, and there were armed guards on the truck. This was a shipment that somebody else was sending, one of the businesses, for their purposes. We piggybacked on and helped defray the cost, but it was an armed guard on a truck full of computers because it was valuable property and could be ripped off. And that was something you'd never think of in many locations.

Q: No. What was your impression of how things were developing there? Were you aware of how the United States developed? Was this part of your training, your experience of American history...was it sort of a replay or not?

McCARTHY: I didn't think of it as a complete replay, just because of the intellectual sign posts that guided leadership in the United States - the basic readings they'd done, the models they were selecting, they were steeped in the Montesquieu, Locke, etc. Whereas, Russia hadn't participated in some of the same historical movements, e.g. the Renaissance, the Enlightenment... well the Enlightenment they did to some extent, the Protestant Reformation, developments like that. In the Soviet period the society was intentionally sealed off, so a lot of information didn't get out to a lot of people. Certainly, in some areas I did see parallels - the wide-open western frontier. People would ask expatriates, "Why did you come here?" "Oh, man, everything's open here. If you've got a good idea and you can figure out how to get there before other people, this is a great opportunity." And the robber baron analogy that you mentioned earlier also applies. But I looked at Russian developments more as groping toward a new system that you can't really see, with resistance at the top all the way as you're trying to go forward, and a population that wants to get there, but there are some hard, big, bitter pills they have to swallow at the same time. Inflation was something like 2,500% when I first arrived.

Library of Congress

People's savings were wiped out. They'd played by the rules, and suddenly one day everybody... all the rules are changed. People on pension were really hurting. So my image of it was of fits and starts, going forward as worth it in the end, but a lot of pain along the way because you're changing everything and you're not ready for it.

Q: Obviously, you weren't working the political circuit, but what were you getting from your Russian counterparts about first Gorbachev and then Yeltsin? And I want to stop here and move- (end of tape)

McCARTHY: Though I didn't have the political beat, I had contacts with the political class. We would send them on International Visitor programs. I would have governors, mayors, and people like that over to my house before they went to the United States. We would have seminars on federalism and similar topics, where we would meet with regional governors and the local leadership, though not with the main purpose of reporting. Gorbachev, he had no support. The people who wanted reform thought he didn't go fast enough, far enough, that he held too long to the idea of reforming Communism. The Communists thought that he sold the system down the river. He changed the economic system, he changed the control by the party. He gave away Eastern Europe, and he destroyed the Soviet Union. So, he was without support... no, no support. That's what happens to leaders.

Yeltsin, I think, opinions of... some people despised Yeltsin and some supported him. Generally, the people that I had most contact with, I think, either looked at him as some sort of great democratic force, saved Russia, saved reform during the coup, courageous. Then, as he began to be more quixotic, I think a lot of people sort of had this sense that, "We don't want the Communists to come back. Yes, there are a lot of decrees, there are a lot of arbitrary decision, and we're not talking about Thomas Jefferson. But he's dealing in a system where this has to be done. He's our best realistic hope for the time being." Something like that, I would say would be pretty common.

Library of Congress

Q: Were you running across a problem, in all that things you were doing, that there wasn't a strong judicial legal framework?

McCARTHY: Yes. That was terrible for business people. You're in a joint venture, the joint venture would be going well, and then you would be displaced... There was at least one high-profile murder. This affected human rights also. The judiciary was poorly paid. No real tradition of an independent judiciary. Everything stacked toward the prosecution. But how did it affect what we were doing? We did support law as one of the fields in our exchange program. We did bring in people to lecture on that. There were experimental jury trials in several of the regions, but that was something that we didn't take on with a major commitment of resources. I believe there was a pretty big USAID project in that area.

Q: Did you find yourself acting as mother hen or something? You had what were these ten other former Soviet states, the 'Stans' and other places. And they were being put together kind of on the cheap. Which struck me always as a very poor decision. But anyway, how did you...

McCARTHY: Very true. And the same thing was happening in USIA. Our offices in the USSR successor states were put together kind of out of our hide, so to speak, without new money. I tended to know most of the people who were out there in the 'Stans,' and sometimes the expectations of what we could do for them from Moscow were beyond what we really could do, e.g. translate books for them and ship them out. We would try to do things for them. If we had a seminar, for example, on running an information resource center, we would want their people to participate. If we had seminars for staff in student advising centers, we would want their people to come in. Of course, there was also some sensitivity about coming back to Moscow, and you had to factor that in. You know, "I thought we were independent states. Why should we always come back to Moscow for training?" Gradually, they sort of weaned themselves away. But initially I think there were unmet expectations. They thought that we were much better supplied. Here's somebody who's chopping wood to get heat down there in Armenia. How can that person not think

Library of Congress

that I, with central heating, etc. could do so much, if I just got off my duff and did it? Not that he said that, but it's jus[laughter]

Q: [laughter] Yes. What about the officers you were getting out, people on your staff? How did you find them?

McCARTHY: Great. In general, in the Moscow mission, people either really wanted to be there or really didn't. For the USIA people, again, the rewards are tremendous. You run this exchange program. You see these people before they go. You see them when they come back. You have an enrichment program for alumni. You arrange a seminar and you go out and you participate in it. Everybody was getting feedback and reinforcement all the time. Without good junior officers, we could not have done half what we did. David Kennedy, for example, really made those information resource centers happen. On the information side, you dealt with dozens of radio and TV stations spread across 11 time zones. They would send somebody through Moscow to make a couple of calls. We were on the circuit and loaded them up with videotapes. They'd go back to their stations, and those videotapes would go on the air. Audiences all around Russian would be exposed to information about the United States, about democracy, about market economics. Carol Lynn McCurdy did a great job on that. We provided dishes for major stations to bring down WordNet programming. So, in general, I can't think of anybody on our staff who wasn't really positive about being there. That didn't mean there weren't frustrations sometimes. It didn't mean that they weren't under a lot of pressure. They were. And the workload for some was crushing. However, we had the great luxury of being able to hire all our FSNs from scratch. Just go out and hire them. And they were fabulous.

Q: You didn't have to go through that government agency.

McCARTHY: No. That was the old system, exactly. No, this was the new Russia. That was one of the great advantages. We got wonderful people. People with highly advanced degrees, intelligent people who spoke English.

Library of Congress

Q: Well, in many ways, you were duplicating what had happened that I am familiar with that happened in Western Europe, right after the war. Working for the Americans was a big deal. We were getting nieces of prime ministers, and we lived off the fat, that luxury, for three or four decades. It went finally. We were no longer the employer of choice. But at one point we just got wonderful people. I guess you were beginning to...

McCARTHY: Yes, not so much that high connection, but more here's someone who's been an English language teacher but always wanted to do something for building up her country. Some people had minor connections, but I'd say it was more quality...

Q: Then you left there when?

McCARTHY: 1995.

Q: What did you think? Whither Russia when you left?

McCARTHY: I was pretty positive. It all depends on what your frame of reference. If you look at Russia and you think about what the United States is, you think, gosh, there are so many things that are not right. But if you think about Russia, as I remember it in the Brezhnev era, when I left, where everything was just stultified, there was no hope of progress. That was just a dead end. That was just flat-lined. They might continue to have military power, but they weren't going to create wealth. You know, that's one of the big problems with Communism. Once you go through the redistribution of the wealth that has accumulated pre-communism, then what? There is a one-time mobilization when everybody's on board, the new "in" group is suddenly upwardly mobile. After they're there, nothing's going on in those societies. So compared to that, to say nothing of compared to Stalinism with the gulags, millions of people in the gulags, forced collectivization, etc., the change is significant. Where they are now compared to their past is remarkable. The Russian people have a great capacity to surprise. It is remarkable that people in St. Petersburg went in and defeated a handpicked candidate under late communism... There

Library of Congress

was only one candidate on the ballot, and all you needed was 50% to win, and enough people crossed out the name that the person didn't win. It's so heartening to see that. And seeing these young people, the raw mental and spiritual talent that's in this society, gave me hope. Still does. Still does give me hope.

Q: Well, Bob, why don't we stop at this point, and we'll pick this up at 1995. Where'd you go?

McCARTHY: I went to direct USIA programs for Eastern Europe and the NIS.

Q: Great.

Today is April 10th, 2003. Bob, you had one job in Washington and you move into another job in Washington, or had you come back? I can't remember.

McCARTHY: I just came back from Russia. I left out a step, actually, for the '95-'96 academic year, I was a diplomat-in-residence at Georgetown University.

Q: Well, let's talk a little bit about that, '95-'96. How did you find Georgetown at that time?

McCARTHY: I liked it. Georgetown has the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy. It's a small outfit, relaxed, scholarly, full of practitioners. You had associates from the Air Force, Army, CIA, foreign governments. So it was interesting. And quite frankly, I really wanted some time to reflect after those seven years in Hungary and Russia. I think that 3 of the 4 years in Hungary and 2 of the 3 years in Russia I probably worked as hard as I ever have, or could, to the limit of my capability.

So, anyway, it was a very good experience to participate in the intellectual life of the university. I ran a colloquium - papers circulated and discussed, once a week. You go and visit different classes, give presentations, brown bag, work with students on projects and

Library of Congress

papers, research, and you have time for your own... What I wanted to do was write a book while I was there. It didn't come out that way, but that was my problem.

Q: Did you find a difference in the academic reading of what was happening in the area you knew, Eastern Europe, Soviet Union, Russia, than you had? Was there a different perspective?

McCARTHY: Not drastically. I think it's more a question of texture, really. I don't think there was a drastic difference.

Q: Of course, sometimes when you are in a country, we tend to... we have a problem, what do you do about it? Rather than whither the country in the next twenty years or so.

McCARTHY: That was our entire focus. What do you do about it. Exactly.

Q: Particularly at that time.

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: You were forging new pathways.

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: Was the academic world getting good information? Were they traveling a lot to Russia? Were they coming back with pretty current knowledge they could put to use?

McCARTHY: Yes, I thought so. I thought they were current. Plus, Georgetown and that Institute had very good relationships with government. Many government officials spent brief periods there, when they would have workshops or seminars or colloquia. There would be participation by individuals with real on-the-ground experience. People like Ambassador Oakley, Ambassador Crocker... people of that level.

Library of Congress

Q: So, in '96, you went back to...

McCARTHY: In '96, I became the Director of the Office of East European and NIS Programs in USIA, and that's the office that has charge of the posts in Eastern Europe and the newly independent states, including personnel. We divided ourselves up somewhat differently from the State Department at that time, so Eastern Europe and the NIS were together rather than separate.

Q: You did that from '96 to when?

McCARTHY: From '96 to '99.

Q: Before we go to what you were doing, how did you find the information agency when you went there? I mean, clouds were hovering overhead. It was going to be melded into the State Department and all. How did this.. what was your initial perception of what this meant and how was it working out while you were dealing with it?

McCARTHY: Well, the clouds got darker, if you want to put it that way, or the clouds got more voluminous as time went on. The merger actually happened in '99. I think there was a lot of concern that we would be misunderstood or would not have time to convince the new host organization, the State Department, of what our particular comparative advantage was. Because there was so much work to be done, and everybody was working so hard, I think the fear was that we would be pressed into service in traditional State Department ways, before our capabilities were really appreciated and utilized. The corporate cultures are different, and whenever a smaller organization merges with a larger organization, the larger organization's corporate culture is dominant. That's normal.

Q: One of the things that concerns me... I was out of the business, but... that the so-called, the new thing was called public diplomacy, might be used to act as a... to justify

Library of Congress

present policy rather than to cultivate long-term ties with exchange programs and things of this nature. Did you see this as a problem?

McCARTHY: I think that was on people's minds, although I think public diplomacy always does both. It explains and advocates current policy, and that's our job, particularly on the information side of the house. And in addition, it takes that long-term view, and I know that was a concern because the corporate cultures are different in several ways. One is that there so many issues that are coming to a boil in the Department every day - talking points that have to be prepared, briefing papers, reports, etc., that have to be done. There's a focus on this week, and what happens this week. And it's legitimate. There is a need to get ready. The focus of exchange programs is very long-term. You sometimes don't see benefits for twenty years. But they're there, and if you want to reap the benefits twenty years from now, you have to plant the seeds now. So, yes, there was definitely that concern.

Q: Well then, let's turn to... Who was the head of the agency while you were there?

McCARTHY: Joseph Duffy.

Q: I've had mixed reviews from people I talked to about him. How did you find him?

McCARTHY: I think he was an academic by disposition. What we really needed at that time was somebody who really understood what USIA could do, who could explain our capabilities in terms of the national interest, and who could give examples of the value we brought to the table. And I don't think he was suited for that at the time.

Q: I've heard people say that he often questioned the validity of USIA.

McCARTHY: I never heard him do that, but...

Q: No, but this is people, sort of when he was musing, people who were close to him...

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: Well, it wasn't a happy fit I take it.

McCARTHY: It certainly wasn't a happy fit in the beginning. I think there is a great irony here. When USIA was brought into the department, we were basically not understood in any depth. We were looked at as an organization that has exchange programs and does press work. How hard could it be, really? And as people got to know more about us, because we were more physically present, I think our capabilities were more appreciated. Events in the outside world have validated the proposition that just because the cold war ends, the need to talk about the U.S., tell America's story to the world, and forge partnerships that go beyond governments is not lessened. It's in fact intensified if anything. At the same time that we have greater appreciation, and even respect perhaps, the ability of USIA or public diplomacy to function as one integrated whole had been reduced, simply because of the way we were divided up when we came into the Department. That doesn't mean public diplomacy can't work this way. All of that is possible, but the desk officers, I think, many of them, in public diplomacy units in the regional bureaus are not as attached to their public diplomacy colleagues in the field as they were. There was a great synergy there, I thought, in the United States Information Agency, and a lot of credence was given to the field perspective. In general, all things being equal, you took the analysis of the Public Affairs Officer in the field as your starting point and tried to deliver the goods. The Department, on the other hand, has a tendency to try to direct things from Washington. Once you are at the Department table, you, as a major player in public diplomacy, need to have a story to tell there too. Our story was that public diplomacy is organized more horizontally, with a flatter structure. Situations were constantly changing on the ground overseas - perceptions, images. We needed to be subtle; we needed to take our cues from officers on the ground who understood how to convey our message in terms of the local culture. That is not a very compelling story at the "grown-ups' table."

Library of Congress

Q: I always felt thought that the information officer, that whole USIA function, abroad was greatly appreciated. There was great interaction because we're all doing the same thing and the perspective often was extremely good, it was very necessary, because we are all working in the field. But when you get back to Washington, it gets caught up in Washington politics and hoping that you don't want to be the messenger of bad news...

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: It's go out there and do that, make the Arabs love us, and that's what you're supposed to do.

McCARTHY: Right. The intentions were all good, and the model that most people spoke of was the country team model, trying to replicate in Washington what happens at the country team level. But it's just hard to do.

Q: What were your responsibilities, '96 to '99. What were you doing?

McCARTHY: From '96 to '99 there were several issues that were important in our part of the world. There was the transition from communism to democracy and market economics. Of the two dozen countries that I had, probably 18 or 19 of them had come into existence during the previous five years, after the disintegration of the USSR and Yugoslavia. They were all previously communist countries, so this was almost a universal theme across the entire geographic area. Then there were the new security arrangements in that part of the world, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, the new role for NATO, and particularly NATO enlargement. There was an immense public diplomacy dimension to that.

Then you had the issues in the Balkans, starting with Bosnia and the Dayton Accords, and 20,000 U.S. troops as part of that 60,000 force sent to Bosnia to oversee compliance.

Library of Congress

Then there was Serbia and its activities, Kosovo, the relationship to Albania. That constellation of former Yugoslav states was a major preoccupation.

And then, cutting across all of those issues was the management challenge. We were downsizing at that point because of budget restrictions. We were cutting positions everywhere. In our case - eastern Europe and the former USSR - we were being downsized before we had ever been upsized. Those were new posts, which had been created out of our own hide. They were understaffed. They had extraordinary responsibilities placed on them and great expectations, so you had to figure out a way to get the job done out there without enough people to do it, and still make decisions where you were going to cut staff and other budget items.

I think those were the major issues.

Q: You would think, that this would, at the time of this, it sounds awful, but it sounds like a wonderful time to be a fairly junior officer getting out there, getting all sorts of responsibility in Kyrgyzstan or something like that.

McCARTHY: And it was. Officers who went out there, almost without exception, there were a few exceptions, returned saying this is the greatest assignment they'd ever had. Even if they didn't welcome the assignment initially, they had enormous responsibility and the resources to make a difference. The whole society, in almost every case, was making an historic transition. What they could provide the countries wanted. So they have interlocutors there and they are getting resources because of these large, separately funded programs, the Freedom of Support Act and the Support for East European Democracy Act. By the time I left the area, we were getting over \$100M in Freedom of Support Act funding for exchanges every year. and maybe another \$15-20M for SEED. That's \$120M basically for exchanges. The worldwide exchanges budget of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs was about \$230M. In other words, the special funding for the NIS/eastern Europe programs was equal to more than half of ECA's funding for

Library of Congress

exchanges with the entire world. So it's an enormous amount. And the officers out there were the ones who got to make the deliveries, while their colleagues in other parts of the world were starving for resources.

Q: You know, when you look at what happened, you have that whole area you had particularly at that time... I'm for familiar with Kyrgyzstan, which seemed to be almost the forefront of moving ahead, but then you've got countries like the Ukraine, which really should be a beacon for everyone seeming to settle into the 1930 model or something like that. Were you separating? Were you saying 'we can do something there; we can't do something there'? How were you working that?

McCARTHY: Exactly that. In some countries, you would have support and you could do a lot of things in tandem with the host government; in some countries, the host government was anti-reform and you were basically working on a separate agenda. The most dramatic case of that would be Belarus where Lukachenko wanted to turn back the clock. He made it very difficult for us to function. He ejected the Soros Foundation from the country, for instance, and did various other things. We decided we would work with NGOs and we would support independent media, to the great dissatisfaction of Lukachenko, but that was where we could make a difference. At some point, those people would come to power. It happened everywhere else, so we knew it would ultimately happen there. In other cases, in Poland, for example, or in Hungary, you could work closely with the government, see where they were going and fit in with their agenda so their agenda and our agenda sort of reinforce one another, and we got more bang for the buck. But even in a place like Kyrgyzstan, which is way out and beyond, we had wonderful possibilities. We had a key Fulbrighter in education who extended two or three times because it was so important. We helped establish the American University of Kyrgyzstan (with FSA funds). That university exemplified merit-based competition, no bribes or payments for marks... taking the best and the brightest. The Soros Foundation provided scholarships to students who couldn't afford the tuition. So, no matter where you were, really, you got tremendous gratification. You really did the Lord's work and advanced U.S. national interests and

Library of Congress

simultaneously advanced the interests of the people in those countries. At times our actions were consistent with host government policy, and at times they did not.

Q: Let's talk about the Soros Foundation. Could you explain who Mr. Soros was, what he was doing, and how we looked upon it. Was it a mixed blessing, or how did it work?

McCARTHY: Well, Mr. Soros is an #migr# from Hungary, an investment banker, who wanted to do the right thing with a good portion of his money. He had everything that he wanted, he said. So he began to promote open societies. In fact eventually, the Soros Foundation offices became known as the Open Society Institute. I remember when I first encountered them in 1988, in Hungary. I went to a provincial city... not provincial in the sense of parochial, but a non-capital city, Szeged, where the peppers grow. I went into a student club, and we were talking about what they are doing and what we might do in exchange programs, etc. I see these TV monitors hanging from the ceiling. I ask, "What do you use those for?" They explained that they have video shows and they bring students in and they have various programs on aspects of democracy, pluralism, etc. I asked, "Where'd you get them?" "Soros Foundation. They came down here and thought we were doing good things and they gave them to us." You go to a library and they run a photocopy for you, which is unusual because all copying machines were closely controlled in the communist era. And I'd say, "That's great, you've got a photocopier." "Soros Foundation gave it to us." So they had done all kinds of things to promote openness.

I always thought the Foundation was a good thing. Naturally, if you control all the resources yourself as one person, you can make changes whenever you want. Turn on a dime if you want. That might be a little disconcerting for partners, if something the partners want to support is no longer going to be supported. But, on balance, I thought it was great. We had a partnership with them in Hungary and jointly established half a dozen student advising centers that worked out very, very well. Several are still functioning. The Soros Foundation still runs a portion of the Muskie exchange program for young professionals in the NIS. They also have programs to sort of promote post-exchange

Library of Congress

activity by participants in the not-for-profit area so that they can afford to apply some of the lessons they learned.

They're very good at recognizing needs. For example, libraries had a shortage of hard currency, which made it difficult for libraries to purchase foreign journals. In addition previously normal ties were cut off between the former states of the Soviet Union and Russia, so the libraries weren't getting academic journals in Russian either. There was greatly reduced access to information. Libraries couldn't afford to pay the price for these things. So, the Soros Foundation stepped in and paid for subscriptions via a wholesaler.

Q: Historic note here... We just spent 15 minutes stopping the interview, going to the top floor of this two-story cottage we're doing the interview in. We're on the State Department grounds, the Foreign Service Institute grounds. A simulation of a nerve gas attack and we have survived it and we have now resumed questioning. [laughter]

McCARTHY: [laughter]

Q: Was anybody every questioning Soros? It sounds like everything was... I can't think of money better spent.

McCARTHY: It was very well spent. He put fiber optics into some cities. He provided all those magazines to all those universities. He did performing arts things and funded the drafting of new textbooks. It seems to me there might have been problems with an individual or an individual office on occasion, but I can't remember anything major. People might, I can't remember chapter and verse, feel that the Foundation would start on a project in partnership and then decide that priorities lay elsewhere. If the partner is a government, it takes longer to make those changes. But I can't think of an example off the top of my head.

Q: But basically, this is a very plus thing. McCARTHY: *Very plus, oh, sure.*

Library of Congress

Q: Were there any other programs going that particularly impacted on your area that you got involved in?

McCARTHY: In Bosnia, for example, after we had the Dayton Peace Accords in December of 1995, we put a TDY person in there right away. One of the things he wanted to do was promote the media in the new Bosnian state, because it was composed of three entities, and we wanted to promote reconciliation and cooperation. You had a Croat part, a Bosnian (Bosniak actually) part, and a Serbian part. You wanted to get reliable information out and have it reach publics in all three parts of Bosnia. So we established the Open Broadcast Network. That involved sending in equipment via U.S. military transport with TDY VOA engineers and a TDY USIA FSO to deal with the stations and other players to install the equipment. That was in partnership with the EU. Their money came in later than ours because of their budget process, but it was a partnership. For much of the time by the way, our TDY FSO used an outdoor plastic picnic table as his office.

We had a civics program in Bosnia, which was very important, because you had these kids who had been in basements for four years during the war there, with Serbs against Bosnians. After the peace, they came out and were going to resume school. One of the key things of interest to them and their parents and their teachers was how to live in a society where people get along.

So civics was very real to them, not at all academic. The Center for Civic Education in California, under a grant by USIA... and here I will say by the way that the Deputy Director of USIA was, very informed and very committed and really made a difference in making this civic education program a success. We worked together with the Council of Europe, so that would be another partnership program. Everybody was on board. The approach was to take American curriculum material and use it, translating and adapting it slightly. This sounds a little a patronizing, U.S.-centric plan, but it was the only way to go forward because those three entities could not agree on a common set of values or a common history which they could draw upon to create their own materials for all of Bosnia. They

Library of Congress

could, however, agree to use third-party materials from a country they all recognized as a democracy.

So this program brought in teachers and curriculum developers. U.S. and European teachers came in, 30 at a time, and would go out and do workshops for Bosnian teachers. Eventually, this curriculum spread throughout much of the school system. You even had Republika Serbska, the Serbian republic, participating. Their school children came together with school children from the Croatian part and Bosnian part and presented their civics projects. Part of the program was to present a project, say recommended draft legislation, for example. They'd have a day or two of these presentations. They'd be televised.

We initiated civics education programs in many countries. Unlike the Bosnian initiative, however, they were focused on developing indigenous materials.

Q: Did you find... you know, our approach to education is different than the French approach to education and the British approach. We all have our own approaches. These things are highly ingrained in the culture. Was it difficult to get teachers from different elements or programs to do this sort of thing without running afoul of each other?

McCARTHY: On the civics program, the Council of Europe teachers tended to emphasize human rights issues more than we did. We tended to emphasize civil society issues more... how governance is established, how people participate in government. On most of these education projects, the need was so great and the interest was so high that people weren't really worrying about the philosophical basis behind something. If they wanted to include journalism in Bosnia and we had a program to link three schools of journalism in the three entities with an American university (as we, in fact, did), they were interested. I should say that the idea of student participation, class involvement in presenting and defending ideas, was greatly appreciated, whatever the particular project. It ran counter

Library of Congress

to the notion of teacher on the pedestal, but teachers - especially younger teachers - welcomed the approach.

Q: As you are entering this period of the Internet and fast communications...

McCARTHY: Yes.

Q: First place, was this a little hard to get used to... because it's almost as if you could have instantaneous direction from Washington into the field, which of course the field resents. But also how to plug other societies into this. How did this work?

McCARTHY: Well, on the first part, communication with Washington was great, because you could send an e-mail at the close of business your day, and come in the next morning and the answer would be there, because they were working while you slept, and vice versa. So that was great. In terms of how you reach out to the rest of society, there were two foci of what we did. One was using the new information technology to get our own information out, like the Washington File (the old Wireless File) with transcripts, testimony, briefings, etc. We sent the File out from Washington by computer directly to the computers of media outlets: television stations, radios, newspapers...

Q: You're talking about foreign ones.

McCARTHY: Foreign, foreign. Yes. The File goes out when ready, so the editors would arrive in the morning and they'd have the File on their, in their computers. We also had a fax-on-demand service at many posts, where people who didn't have Internet connections would dial a number and have material faxed to them. Some of our posts had an archive service, so you could put in a term like NATO, Kazakhstan, missiles. And you could find any material on that.

But in addition to that, getting our own materials out, we wanted to try to make up for lost time and help these countries connect with the outside world again. That relates

Library of Congress

particularly to the NIS. We developed a very good program, the Internet Access and Training Program (IATP). Through this program, we set up Internet sites around all of the NIS. You would go into an institution and ask to go into partnership with them. They would make available space. You would provide computers. The NGO grantee would provide a trainer there for a year, and that individual would train a successor. The sites provided Internet access to people who could come in and go online for serious purposes. You would invite in people from important disciplines and professions and run seminars on how to use the Internet for professional purposes - to research a news story, run an NGO, improve the environment, get legal information, etc. We had dozens of sites.

One level up from that, were information resource centers. And every embassy... and the USIA was really out in front on this stuff, I have to say. We were really out in front. We had information resource centers attached to embassies. In there you'd have good Internet connectivity with a fast line. You'd have paid subscription services to databases. You would have hundreds and hundreds of journals available there in the center, for example through the ProQuest system, on CDs. And you'd have a reference librarian who could answer questions. In many of these countries, parliamentarians would ask us for information on U.S. laws when considering legislation. So you had several stages. You had the embassy getting information out; you had information resource centers providing information in a very targeted way, and you had these indigenous access points to stimulate access by the society. Project Harmony, which ran the Internet Access and Training Program in several countries organized competitions to put up local sites in local languages, in Russian or Uzbek or whatever on a particular subject, say some aspect of ecology. There would be a 6-month competition. And people would do wonderful things: categorizing flora and fauna; surveying pollution in rivers. And the next time it would be a competition on teaching methodologies, 6-months. And again, for almost no money, they'd put up this site and they'd get a cash award of say \$5,000 to do more with it.

Q: Yes. Were we pushing the acquisition of computers with Internet capabilities all over?

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: Yes. We were pushing that and we would donate them in some instances.

Q: One of the problems, in the United States it's not too bad, but in some of the European, in fact in England and other places, it's been a problem... the local telephone systems were pretty slow in responding and they wanted to charge all outdoors and made this whole thing very slow. Did you have a problem with that?

McCARTHY: It depended on the country and it depended on the region in the country. That was certainly a problem in many areas. It was always necessary to advise our colleagues, when putting something up on the Web, to always have a text-only version. When you have these neat graphics, people cannot download them. Also to advise people don't send unsolicited e-mails with big attachments. It takes too long and people pay for that. It has to be something they want. So there's a communication discipline involved in that too.

Q: Were there any other efforts you were working on? Were you working all the time in the agency?

McCARTHY: During the three years?

Q: Yes.

McCARTHY: The NATO enlargement issue was extremely important, and again, every country had its own approach, and we supported it from Washington. But the elements of our support generally included some version the following: you send key decision makers from parliamentary committees or journalists who follow security issues to the United States on the International Visitor Program. The information resource centers would package up materials specifically for the decisionmakers. The PAOs would be working to get the word out. They'd be using speakers who'd be coming in. Any visit by, say, the

Library of Congress

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Congressmen, relevant administration officials would involve a public appearance to answer questions.

In some cases, this was completely in sync with what the government was doing. For example, in Hungary, we provided material to Hungarian Radio that had a NATO Day, and they had one hour in the life of servicemen in Fort Riley. They had archival material. They had interviews on open phone lines with people back in Washington who were handling NATO affairs, "What is the Congressional perspective?" "What is the military perspective?" "What does it mean, that interoperability?" "What are the budget implications?" Because Hungary was going to have a referendum, the post there went all out to make sure the word got out. They had the Taszar U.S. air base at that time in southern Hungary, which was the staging ground for troops going into Bosnia, and later on they had Kosovo air strikes coming out of there. But the post used that base as a way to familiarize journalists, parliamentarians, and others with NATO in practice... they would have tours. The PAO and IO would arrange tours of the Taszar base for influential Hungarians and local leadership.

In Slovakia, by contrast, the situation was completely the other way around. The government wanted to portray NATO enlargement as a conspiracy against the Slovaks not to let them join, and sort of tar the USG and NATO with that brush. So there, In Czechoslovakia, the post devised a strategy to make sure that the entrance criteria were well known, and it would be noted by all public speakers that the Slovaks were not meeting these criteria. You can get in if you meet the criteria and if you don't, you don't get it that was the message. Poland and the Czech Republic were more along the lines of Hungary.

Q: Just for somebody to understand... This was the beginning of the enlargement of NATO. It was the American policy to encourage NATO.

McCARTHY: Yes, that's right. And three countries, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic came in in 1999. There was the big summit in Madrid and invitations were tendered and by the end of the year they came in.

Library of Congress

Oh, alert PAOs in those three countries noted that on the accession date, nothing in particular was planned with those countries to acknowledge it. So they did a joint cable pointing this out. Secretary Albright then, who was at a ceremony in the United States recognizing the enlargement, also did a WordNet with those countries, which was broadcast on national television, and the broadcast was coordinated with displays in the public squares, balloons going up, and everything. So that broadcast really sort of solidified that relationship. Otherwise it would have been a misstep, a missed opportunity in terms of public diplomacy. It was also an example of Washington responding rapidly to a proposal from field officers.

Q: How about the WordNet? Again, this was way in ad- (end of tape)

Bob, you might explain what the WordNet was, and how it had developed by the time you were doing it. McCARTHY: WordNet was a worldwide television system involving transmission and production facilities in Washington, DC, in USIA, and reception facilities on most embassies around the world. There would be a dish there on the embassy someplace so they could take in a signal. There would be reception dishes at key media outlets abroad that would be donated by the U.S. government. That enabled those television stations to do interactive interviews with policy makers in the United States on very short notice, and enabled us to put out all kinds of material that could be downloaded by these television stations and also be downloaded by USIA colleagues in embassies overseas. Those officers could tape programs and use them for seminars or send material out to someone who was particularly interested. It was real-time connectivity via television.

An example. And it's relevant to this particular time... When Milosevic in Serbia was cracking down on the media, we had a WordNet studio in our Belgrade embassy. That embassy would do an interactive interview with, let's say, an assistant secretary of state or somebody at the National Security Council. They would invite in representatives of journals and television stations, radio stations. They would hear the WordNet and then ask questions. They would be on mic asking questions. Everything would be translated into

Library of Congress

Serbian and recorded on video and audio cassettes. Then, as the journalists left, they'd be given a cassette of that broadcast. They would then go back to their own cities, and at that time the municipalities were in the hands of the opposition, they'd go back to their own cities and broadcast those programs. So, it would be a way of getting the signal out. Getting the message out, I should say.

Q: Well, I take it the WordNet really had embedded itself into the system by this time.

McCARTHY: Yes, but it wasn't everywhere. Again, in Bosnia, for example... too complicated to explain the background... but there was a television station in the Serbian Republic and an election coming up. We wanted to make sure that prospective voters there understood our policy. So, we donated a dish to the station, and then had all the key individuals in Washington concerned with policy toward Bosnia go on the air in real time, for uncensored broadcasts to the entire population. Senator Lugar was on, Ambassador Gelbard, Ambassador Holbrook....all the big policy makers. That ensured that our message, again, got out, not skewed, not interpreted for the gain of any one political party. So the idea was embedded, but the system wasn't up and functioning everywhere.

Q: Well, is there anything else we should cover during this time?

McCARTHY: I think there are a couple of things that I thought we did particularly well. We talked about large exchange programs that promoted reform. We also did a good job providing TDY personnel to staff important operations, concentrating personnel where they were needed most at critical times. At peak times in Bosnia, we sometimes had a dozen people in there. We had a constant roster of people going to Sarajevo for three months or so. We also, on the management side, had what we called a SWAT team. Foreign service nationals from a post or two, a professional trainer from USIA, and a regional programming officer from our regional office in Vienna went to a particular post. The post would close down for two days or so and they'd do team building and focus on mission

Library of Congress

goals, communication, and other issues, and eighty percent of the time they'd leave that post better off than they found it.

Let's go back to Kyrgyzstan again. The PAO who hosted the SWAT Team in Kyrgyzstan noted tremendous differences after that team left. Her local staff were doing things like calling the military attach# to get together and talk about issues. An FSN would have been reluctant to do that before the seminar. Several people got drivers' licenses who hadn't had them before. And then some of their spouses, some of the women, got drivers' licenses, which was unusual. So there were repercussions both in personal life and in increasing the efficiency of the post.

That also reminds me of how well our Regional Programming Office (RPO) in Vienna functioned. RPO was a real lifeline for those incredibly stressed posts. RPO assessed computer needs, ordered equipment, helped install it, and trained staff. They arranged exhibits and displays in all the local languages, taking a project from the concept stage through delivery of the physical product. We held a variety of training sessions at RPO. When a presidential visit was scheduled, RPO prepared signage and printed multiple copies of the ready reference booklet for accompanying press, drafted by the USIS post. RPO in every way was a best practice.

Let me just mention a couple of other things we did that I thought really drew on the comparative advantage of USIA and wouldn't have happened if we hadn't been there. During the Kosovo crisis, at one juncture there were negotiations at Rambouillet, France to reach a settlement. Participating were the Serbs, different parties from Kosovo, and a contact group of nations sponsoring the conference. At the end, there was a draft agreement and we wanted both the Kosovars and the Serbs to sign off on it. A week had gone by, neither party had signed off. The Kosovars wanted to familiarize public opinion with the contents of the agreement, but there was a real problem. You have this semi-occupied tense area in Kosovo with lots of restrictions in place, including media limitations.

Library of Congress

You want to get the word out on what the contents of this agreement are, so people can understand it and say yea or nay. How do you do that?

Our PAO in Tirana, Albania, proposed that Albanian television in Tirana receive a daily broadcast from Washington, bounce it off a satellite to Albanian speakers in Albania, including this is the important part - Albanian speakers in Kosovo in the broadcast footprint. So, every day, in the Washington studios here, a policy maker would examine a different section of the draft agreement, discuss it, and then take questions from the audience. And people would call in from the studio in Tirana, and journalists would call in from homes in Kosovo and ask questions. As a result, night after night, a large swath of the population in Kosovo became familiar with the provisions of this draft agreement. We know it was effective because our Macedonia PAO, Phil Reeker, who was with Ambassador Hill, who was charged with negotiating this agreement, was up in the mountains of Kosovo with Kosovo Liberation Army folks. There was a lull, and he asked whether anybody had heard the broadcasts. They all said they'd heard the broadcasts and then offered him tips on how to improve them. So, we know it was getting through. Kosovo did approve Rambouillet; Serbia did not. And then the bombing started. That's something that I don't think anybody else could have done, to get back to your WordNet question. Another example, while we are on the subject. When NATO troops seized the transmitters in the Serbian Republic, because they were broadcasting hate messages...

Q: This was the Serbian part of Bosnia.

McCARTHY: Yes, exactly. The Serbian station went off the air, was taken off the air. Suddenly, Banja Luka, the major city there, their television station became the hub of all broadcasting. There were Assembly elections coming up, and there was tremendous fear that television screens would go dark, because Banja Luka was not prepared to handle a full TV schedule. They wouldn't have any programming... no sports, sitcoms.... People would associate the lack of programming with NATO, with taking the other programs off the air and it would affect the reformers negatively in the election. So, based on that, USIA

Library of Congress

got a van full of broadcast tapes driven down from Belgrade, TDYers went out with packs of tapes from Washington, WordNet broadcasts to Sarajevo were taped and transported up to Banja Luka, a Slovenia TV station loaned tapes. I think it was a station associated with Mark Palmer, if I remember. All this stuff came in quickly and filled the void. Again, it's a small thing people don't think about until it happens, but somebody had to get there and keep that station on the air because they couldn't just be broadcasting news and alienate everybody who counted on television for entertainment.

Q: In '99, what happened for you?McCARTHY: In '99, I moved to the Office of Policy and Evaluation in the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs.

Q: And you did that for how long?

McCARTHY: I did that for three years, '99 to 2002.

Q: This had to be quite an interesting time, sort of professionally. What you were doing there, because you were in this difficult transition into the State Department, how did it play out?

McCARTHY: It was, and one of the things we wanted to make sure we did was explain USIA and explain public diplomacy assets any opportunity we got. The annual planning cycle presented one opportunity. Every bureau had its Bureau Performance Plan, which it presented to the senior leadership in the Department, the Secretary if she were available, or the Deputy, or, as in our case, Ambassador Pickering. Our office was in charge of putting together the PowerPoint for that. We combined a description of what we do, what our capabilities were, proof that what we do works, and our plan for the future in a crisp, 30-minute PowerPoint. It was very well received.

Q: Explain what PowerPoint is.

Library of Congress

McCARTHY: PowerPoint is a computer-generated system of slides that go up on a screen, like a small movie, and it's accompanied by sound, if you want it to be. Assistant Secretary Bader read the script that went along with it and took the questions at the end. And there are other instances of trying to understand what the perceptions of people at State were, and our perceptions, and trying to blend them.

In any case it was important to know whether our programs actually worked. One of the big questions is "You have these exchange programs, so what? What does it mean, and how do you know they work?" So we had large survey research projects on exchange programs. We probably have two dozen completed by now... and they really, for the most part, validate the assumptions of the programs.

For example, we did a survey of senior Fulbright scholars from the United States over a 25-year period. It was a web-based survey if they wanted, or paper and pencil if they wanted. More than 80% wanted web-based, which gets back to your point again, of the Internet's being integrated into everything. The results were fascinating. Among the findings, 75% of these scholars still collaborate with overseas partners. Seventy percent initiated exchange programs on their own. Virtually all of them incorporated their Fulbright experience into their teaching, into their lecturing, into their writing. Many had written books, etc. Almost all had given presentations to public groups in their host countries and back in the U.S. So the point is that a Fulbright award is far more than an enriching academic experience for an individual. There is a multiplier effect - a force multiplier, as the military would say. Individual scholars magnify and amplify the experience when they come back. And there are many other examples of effectiveness. The Business for Russia Program for Entrepreneurs, for instance. When we surveyed them, they marketed their products better, they innovated more, their profits went up, they hired more people, they had a wider market for their products. I could go on and on, but it's on our Web page. These evaluations made a significant contribution to meeting the demands of OMB, the Office of Management and Budget, while also satisfying ourselves that the programs work.

Library of Congress

One thing that I'm particularly proud of... Our office had responsibility for all the programs in the NIS in Eastern Europe, that is coordinating... I should say... for coordinating the budgets. And we began to realize that we needed to focus on alumni activities in a more systematic way. A lot of activity had been done by different offices in the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs on this, but they were not coordinated. We hired an alumni coordinator and we put up a Web site. One of the big problems, when you have hundreds of thousands of alumni, is knowing who they are and where they are. And trying to play catch up is a very time-consuming undertaking. At the same time, you have new alumni coming online every day. We know all these alumni want a way to communicate with each other and want a way to communicate with the United States so that their exchange experience isn't one shot, it's an ongoing thing. So we put up a website that was interactive and that encouraged alumni to use the site for their own purposes and to communicate with one another. We built in enough incentives that they would want to use it and that they would come back. So we started that in April of 2001, with a few participants, and there are now are well over 4,000. Alumni can go on line and find people who went to the same university, find people who are in the same town, find people who are in the same field. They post job openings and it's now the case the alumni, senior alumni, are hiring new alumni. There's a whole section on grants and one on professional development. There are related links. There's a whole network of interesting, important information for them. We can go on there and see who is doing what. They have the capacity to make their experience more relevant because they can get resources. Eventually, this will grow and grow and it will become worldwide. Assistant Secretary Bill Bader made this a priority and tasked our office with making it happen.

Q: I must say the exchange programs over the years, and we're talking about God, it must be getting close to 50 years or so...

McCARTHY: Yes

Library of Congress

*Q: Have been a tremendous success. Basically, we've got something to pass on to people. The American experience is essentially an international experience anyway. We've always been an absorptive society. People who come here usually don't feel on the outside.*McCARTHY: *Right.*

Q: They are readily accepted. It's sort of unheralded work that's been going on for years these many years, that's had tremendous payoff for us.

McCARTHY: That's true, and when something like 9-11 happened, ECA initiated special International Visitor programs for individuals from countries with large Islamic populations: Morocco, Egypt, Syria even, Indonesia. There must have been a dozen countries. And they came here and we did a special evaluation of those programs. They definitely learned more about the United States. They felt that Americans wanted to learn about them. They felt they had the chance to tell Americans about themselves. The appreciation of volunteerism and pluralism was very high. In short their view of the U.S., after direct exposure, was anything but the stereotype one sees reflected in the Pew public opinion surveys. So, when a particular issue comes up, these exchange programs can be tailored quite precisely. And direct personal exposure to the American experience you mentioned is critical.

Q: As you look back on your career, how did you feel whither the public diplomacy field? Where is it going?

McCARTHY: I think it's an open question. I think there is, as I mentioned earlier, a lot of appreciation for it. FSI, the Foreign Service Institute, is now instituting normal training for public diplomacy officers, under Pat McArdle's expert guidance, just the way a consular officer or admin officer has training. Initially we got three weeks of training to cover everything. That reflected the "How hard can it be?" view. I'm afraid that the career prospects won't be very great for somebody in public diplomacy. So, people will go in for a few years and then move out. Some of the esprit and corporate memory will die out. I

Library of Congress

hope that we don't, five to ten years from now, declare a victory and say, "Everybody is a public diplomatist now, so we really don't need a public diplomacy cone any more." Public diplomacy sections in missions are no longer linked tightly to public diplomacy colleagues in Washington. The levers linking the parts have been detached. And the administrative burden, stemming from integration, I understand, is still substantial and distracting. The budget could be vulnerable. It's an open question. Public diplomacy is not yet established as an effective component of State's activities. But it's not the case that public diplomacy is in the garbage can.

Q: What are you doing now? You're retired, I take it.

McCARTHY: I'm retired, and, with a colleague, Mark Jacobs, I'm developing a new course for Cultural Affairs Officers for the Foreign Service Institute... It's a great job, trying to introduce practical exercises and create situations where CAOs have to deal with real life problems.

Q: Have you had much contact with student here?

McCARTHY: Not yet. No. No sense cluttering my mind with the end-users.

Q: [laughter] Say in cultural affairs, how about the new technology? Is this making a difference?

McCARTHY: I think everybody uses technology now to communicate quickly. At the same time, the old technology is also beneficial. For example, after 9/11, we sent an exhibit of photographs from Ground Zero in New York City around the world. It's been to probably 75-80 countries by now. And this is the old fashioned model - mounted pictures with text and accompanying speakers. At the same time, you can go online and look at that same exhibit from anywhere in the world, if you have Internet access. I think it's just a component of everything one does now. It's not isolated out as "Now what do we

Library of Congress

do in technology?" It's more this is the objective, this is how we want to do it, and we'll incorporate technology into our approach.

Q: It raises a question... When USIA came into existence, the big rule was that it was not going to propagandize the United States.

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: That's always a no-no.

McCARTHY: Right.

Q: But when you start putting things on the Internet, it goes everywhere.

McCARTHY: [laughter] That's true. That's very true. We don't disseminate the website addresses within the United States, but that's... of course anybody can find...

Q: But anyway, that hasn't turned into a problem...

McCARTHY: It hasn't turned into a problem. I think when you look at the multiplicity of sources of information, the threat has probably been reduced from what it might have been when ...

Q: I think there was a feel that this could become a sort of a government way of...

McCARTHY: Exactly...

Q: Getting sort of a ministry of propaganda...

McCARTHY: Exactly. As you know, we couldn't distribute our products in the U.S., except for Problems of Communism, which was a scholarly journal, and English Teaching Forum, which is a magazine for English teachers. There was special congressional approval for "Years of Lightning, Days of Drums," and a few other special efforts like that.

Library of Congress

Q: *Special things.*

McCARTHY: Special.

Q: *Right now, and I don't know how much you've gotten involve in it, the Iraq War... this is in April, 2003. There's been a great deal of hostility shown in the Muslim world against the United States. How have you felt we've been able to respond to this?*

McCARTHY: As I understand the surveys, most of the objections are to policy rather than to the United States or to Americans. We can articulate the policy, we can explain the United States... it's a long-term proposition. I don't think public diplomacy is particularly adept at taking a fact on the ground and making it palatable to people who don't like it. I think public diplomacy's great contribution is in establishing channels of communication, relationships of trust, awareness of how the United States works, an appreciation of its values and particular advantages, so that one is less likely to believe in stereotypes and gross misrepresentations. They will be skeptical about outlandish charges. That occurs as the result of years of attentive, adequately financed work in the field. But I don't think there is any magic way to present a policy so that suddenly you change public opinion.

Q: *Okay, Bob, I think this is a good place to stop.*

McCARTHY: Okay, thanks very much.

End of interview